

**A CASE STUDY OF CHALLENGES FACING THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE ZOMBA DISTRICT,
MALAWI.**

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STATEMENT

**A research report submitted to the School of Education, University of the
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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Education in Malawi introduced Life skills Education program with the intention to empower children with appropriate information and skills to deal with social and health problems affecting the nation including the fight against HIV infections. This study investigates factors affecting the implementation of the Life skills programme in four schools in the Zomba District, Malawi. A curriculum is not implemented within a contextual vacuum. I draw on Cornbleth's (1990) notions of the structural and social contexts to study the contexts of the school organisation, classroom environment and social-economic-political context in which the curriculum is implemented. Within this framework, I use Whitaker's(1993) identification of key role players in curriculum implementation, to consider the specific ways in which teachers, learners, principals, district officials and the community affect the implementation of this curriculum within the schools I chose to study.

Findings suggest that the implementation of Life skills is constrained by a variety of social and structural contextual factors. Some of the crucial factors hampering the teaching of Life skills are the poor conditions under which teachers are working. Teachers are paid very little salaries and this affects their motivation to teaching making some of these teachers giving most attention to what they perceive as priority subjects only such as Maths and Languages at the expense of Life skills.

The cascade model of training leaves the responsibility of training Life skills teachers to school principals who are not subject specialists. This adds to their already highly pressured roles in terms of managing their schools, resources and learners. The training of teachers in life skills curriculum involves two days of training. This short duration of the training is not sufficient to develop understanding of content and empower teachers to mediate sensitive topics with

confidence. This model of training also undermines professional responsibility of each teacher to empower themselves to become subject experts in the subjects they teach.

The inaccessible language used within the Teachers' Guide contributes to the omission of areas of the curriculum by teachers who struggle to understand and teach certain topics.

The case study shows that hunger experienced by learners affects their concentration in class and leads to frequent absences.

It has been found that the Life skills curriculum is not supported by all sectors of the community. Certain teachers and their principals found a clash between rural communities' cultural beliefs and the Life skills programme.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS affects both the teachers of Life skills and their learners resulting in teachers feeling uncomfortable and reluctant to teach that which affect them and their learners. Some teachers believe that it is inappropriate to teach sexual matters to children of this age. This results in the teachers omitting the very issues that the Life skills curriculum has sought to address.

Given these issues, the research finds significant challenges facing the implementation of the Life skills curriculum in Malawi and based on the findings, recommendations are made for improvement of the implementation of the Life skills program.

Key words:

Life skills Education program, curriculum implementation, factors influencing curriculum implementation.

DECLARATION

I declare that “*A case study of challenges facing the teaching of Life skills education in the primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi*” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated by means of complete references. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education by Course work and Research Report in the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

(Signature)

(Date)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

1. AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
2. HIV – Human Immune Deficiency Virus
3. Life skills Education – An integrated subject which is a combination of Health Education, Religious Education, Social Studies and Physical Education
4. MOEST – Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
5. MIE – Malawi Institute of Education
6. UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Education Fund

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

Malawi is a country plagued by social and health problems, such as drug and substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancies and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. About 16.4% of Malawians of between the ages of 15 and 49 years are HIV positive (National AIDS Commission, 2004, p.20). These social and health problems are on the increase among the youth who are nevertheless regarded as “a window of hope” for the poverty-stricken nation (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2000). The social and health challenges demand that the young people be empowered with appropriate information and skills to enable them to effectively deal with these situations.

Rooth (2005) argues that Life skills education can delay the onset of drug usage, prevent high-risk sexual behaviour and promote beneficial social adjustment. Life skills education is regarded as “the practice and reinforcement of psychological skills that contribute to personal and social development and the prevention of health and social problems” (UNICEF, 2002, p. 4). With the necessary life skills to make informed and responsible decisions, learners will be better equipped to deal with the challenges they face (UNICEF, 2002).

Life skills Education was introduced in Malawian primary schools as a way of empowering children with appropriate information and skills in the fight against HIV infections and AIDS and for them to deal with various other everyday social and health problems affecting them. The following section looks at the meaning and purpose of Life skills Education program in the primary schools in Malawi.

1.2 Meaning and purpose of Life skills Education

Life skills are ‘the skills that enable learners to understand themselves, the world and their place in it’ (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2000c, p. 92). Life skills Education on the other

hand is defined as ‘an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which enable them to cope with challenges of life’ (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2000b, p. 92). Life skills Education aims to ‘continue and extend the development of the skills that the learners bring from home with a focus on the promotion of the holistic development of the learner’ (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2000a, p. 92). The life skills program aims to teach learners to organize and manage their lives, to develop team spirit regardless of cultural and religious backgrounds, to avoid diseases such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, to develop positive self-esteem, to cope with the problems of adolescence and to prepare them for the world of work (Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2000a). Life skills Education thus aims to nurture learner development physically as well as socially, emotionally, intellectually, creatively and spiritually. Such holistic development is ‘essential for the learners’ healthy living as individuals, and members of families and societies which form the basis for all other learning’ (Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2000a, p. 92). The curriculum aims to develop each learner in the following areas:

1. **Personal development.** The learners should be able to use self-esteem to achieve and extend their personal potential to respond effectively to daily challenges.
2. **How to stay healthy.** The learners should be able to make informed decisions on their safety; demonstrate health-promoting behaviour in their personal lives as well as in their communities and the wider environment while paying particular attention to prevalent diseases such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV and AIDS.
3. **Social development.** The learners should be able to live and work effectively as members of a family, group, community and a nation with respect to gender equity, and show an understanding of individual rights and responsibilities within the wider society.

4. **Moral Development.** The learners should be able to demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultures and religions through a commitment to moral values, human rights and the rule of law.
5. **Physical development.** The learners should be able to demonstrate an understanding of how physical growth is linked to social, emotional and personal changes. These changes will be demonstrated through participation in activities such as games and sports.
6. **Entrepreneurship and world of work.** The learners should be able to understand the world of work in its widest sense and demonstrate how to access further knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for work.

(Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2000a, p.92)

There are initial indications that the realities in primary schools make the implementation of the curriculum difficult. According to Malawi Institute of Education¹ report on the monitoring survey of the implementation of Life skills Education in Standards (grades) 5, 6, 7 and 8 conducted in 2006, Life skills Education is taught for the benefit of visitors only. As the report puts it, “Teaching of Life skills Education on the days of data collection seems to have been prompted by our sending information about our visits” (MIE, 2006). Other challenging circumstances which adversely affect the teaching of Life skills Education have been documented. They include lack of instructional materials (MIE, 2006) and the unprofessional conduct of the teachers.

Lack of professionalism on the part of teachers includes being involved in substance abuse (drug and alcohol), sexual relations with pupils and theft of teaching and learning materials (Kadzamira, 2006). Because ‘values are better taught by the teacher living them’ (Jansen, 2008), this deprives the class of an environment conducive for learning of values. Prinsloo (2007, p. 160) adds that ‘teachers’ own self-discipline, diligence, and high moral standards are

¹ The National Curriculum Development Centre in Malawi and the Malawi Ministry of Education’s implementation arm of educational policies in primary, secondary schools and teacher training colleges.

important requisites for the successful implementation of these Life-Orientation/Life skills Education programs'. According to Prinsloo (2007, p. 160) 'morality defines a person's behaviour as good or bad, right or wrong, and teachers whose behaviour is regarded as bad and wrong by learners are unable to be successful facilitators in the programs.' These arguments imply that some teachers who teach learners values in Life skills Education may be undermining the program through their conduct.

1.3 Statement of the Research problem

Serious problems seem to be undermining the implementation of the Life skills program, and these may reduce possibilities of saving the lives of young people, regarded as the window of hope in Malawi. This explains my interest in exploring the challenges facing the teaching of this curriculum to 9-10 year olds of Standard 4 of the lower primary school. This study investigates the challenges facing the teaching of Life skills in Standard 4 in the Zomba district in Malawi in 2008. The findings of this study will generate recommendations to address some of the challenges facing the implementation of the Life skills program.

1.4 Aim of the research

The aim of the research is to investigate Life skills Education at four primary schools and identify contextual factors that hinder the implementation of Life skills Education program in Zomba district, Malawi. Furthermore, this study will seek to understand how different role-players (including teachers, learners, principals, district officials and the community) affect curriculum implementation within this context.

The aim of the research project is not to analyse the Life skills curriculum itself, in terms of its strengths or weaknesses. While acknowledging that no curriculum is beyond critique, such analysis is beyond the scope of this research project.

1.5 Research Question

As a consequence of the aim, this is the main research question.

What are the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills Education in primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi?

A subsidiary question has been formulated to enable exploration of the main question.

How does implementation of Life skills Education differ in different contexts and why?

In addressing the subsidiary question, I will specifically consider three **focus questions**:

- To what extent do teachers in Zomba district understand the goals of Life skills as they implement the subject in the classroom?
- How effective is the training for Life skills Education that these teachers have received?
- What structural and social contextual factors enable/hinder successful implementation of Life skills Education?

1.6 Rationale

The Malawi Ministry of Education's rationale for introducing Life skills Education program is to provide young people with appropriate information and skills to empower them effectively to deal with HIV/AIDS pandemic, drug and substance abuse, juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancies. The social and health problems in Malawi suggest that the program could have value as an intervention. However, the success of the program at classroom level will determine the effect it has in the lives of learners. One step forward to facilitating the successful implementation of this subject at classroom level is to uncover challenges in the teaching of the subject, investigate possible causes of these challenges and suggest how these challenges can be addressed. If the challenges that face the teaching of the subject can be understood, then assistance might be offered to teachers and the program's designers on how to

address problem areas in this curriculum, leading to a more successful implementation of the program.

Studies of several scholars, for example, Fullan (1992) and Pratt (1980) have noted that the success of any curriculum hinges on investigating the challenges during its implementation stage. These scholars highlight that the important aspect of a curriculum is its impact on the learners. No matter how well designed a curriculum might be, it is useless if it does not yield the intended results during implementation.

Fullan (1992, p. 22) gives an important reason for investigating the implementation stage of curriculum development. He argues that if the implementation perspective is understood deeply and authentically, it can be a “powerful resource for accomplishing real improvements in classrooms and schools”(p.32). Pratt (1980, p. 409) similarly contends that ‘many an excellent curriculum has had insignificant results because its designers limited their horizon to production of a curriculum rather than implementation of the program’.

I have also been inspired by my personal observations of the Life skills Education program as it attempts to intervene in social and health crises affecting the country. The program deals with sensitive issues in an environment of varied cultural beliefs. Initial indications suggest that teachers face significant challenges in implementing the Life skills Education program. This study seeks to identify these challenges.

1.7 Closing remarks

The Life skills Education curriculum was introduced in Malawian primary schools with the intention to empower children with appropriate information and skills in the fight against HIV infections and for them to deal with various other everyday social and health problems affecting the nation. However, there is evidence that there exist serious challenges regarding the implementation of this curriculum. This study is undertaken to investigate the factors that hinder the implementation of this curriculum. The findings of this study will generate

recommendations to address some of the challenges facing the implementation of the Life skills curriculum.

1.8 Structure of Report

The structure of the subsequent chapters of this report is as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the conceptual framework for an investigation into the challenges facing the teaching of Life skills Education curriculum in Zomba district in Malawi.

Chapter 3 describes research methodology chosen for this research including the instruments which will be used for data collection. Chapter 4 presents data analysis. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings of the study. Chapter 6 rounds off the research process by providing overall conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to locate the study in the context of the crisis in Malawi Education. I will therefore begin by reviewing the state of teaching, teacher education and education in Malawi. I will then locate this study conceptually by reviewing literature related to curriculum implementation.

2.2 Context for the study: Malawi

2.2.1 Political Overview

Malawi is a country south of the equator in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country is divided into three regions: Northern, Central, and the Southern Regions, which are further divided into 28 districts.

The country was called Nyasaland, which means ‘land of the lake’ under British rule from 1891 until 1964 when it became independent and became a republic two years later in 1966. In 1994, after 30 years of one party dictatorship, Malawi became a multi-party democracy. This dispensation ushered in a change in policies regarding education such as the Free Primary Education policy (FPE) and this has brought about a ‘high degree of complexity regarding access, quality, financing and planning of basic education’ (Kadyoma, 2004, p. 9).

2.2.2 Economy and health

Economically, the country is classified as a least developed country with very low human development. The per capita income is estimated at US\$165. The national poverty incidence is estimated at 65.3%, of which 66.5% and 54.9% are rural and urban poverty incidences respectively. The poverty line is about US\$3 per month (National AIDS Commission, 2004).

Incomes are very low and unevenly distributed. Income disparities are found in cases where those who are highly educated and/or skilled earn more on average than those who are unskilled with little education. The economy is agriculture-based which renders it vulnerable to world market fluctuations, adversely affecting the living standards of most Malawians. Unskilled workers seek to survive through engaging in casual labour activities on the fields of others or prostituting – thus exposing themselves to a high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (National AIDS Commission, 2004, p.20). According to National AIDS Commission (2004, p. 20), the country continues to experience ‘chronic under-nutrition coupled with the upsurge of HIV/AIDS.’ Currently, the National AIDS Commission in Malawi estimates that about 16.4% of Malawians of between the ages 15 and 49 years are HIV positive (National AIDS Commission, 2004, p. 20). The effects of HIV/AIDS epidemic are mostly being felt through the reduced life expectancy, high dependency ratio, loss of productive work force, and increasing health costs at household and national levels (National AIDS Commission, 2004).

2.2.3 Education

2.2.3.1 Primary, secondary and tertiary education system

The education system in Malawi follows an 8-4-4 pattern of primary, secondary and tertiary phases. The primary education lasts eight years and is divided into three sections comprising infant (Standards 1 and 2), junior (Standards 3, 4 and 5) and senior (Standards 6, 7 and 8) levels. Secondary education lasts four years. The duration of tertiary education varies between two and four years. This level includes technical and vocational education, primary teacher training institutions and university education.

According to Banda (2002), the main educational challenges facing Malawi are in the areas of access, equity, quality, relevance, management, planning and finance at all three levels of the education system. In primary education, the most crucial challenge is the improvement of quality and relevance of basic education. In order to ensure the improvement of quality and

relevance of basic education, the Policy and Investment Framework² stresses the need for relevant curriculum to *'be more reflective of changing socio-economic and political realities'*. This has prompted the curriculum to focus on 'basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as lifelong and critical thinking and analytical skills' (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2000a, p. 6 cited in Banda, 2002).

2.2.3.2 Teacher education system

Teacher education in Malawi is divided into two distinct categories. The first, one of the concern of this study, is Primary Teacher Training, controlled by the Ministry of Education. The second is the Secondary School Teacher Education, primarily under University of Malawi but supplemented by upgrading courses mounted by the Ministry of Education at Domasi College of Education in Zomba district.

A major goal of primary teacher education in Malawi is that primary school teachers 'acquire sufficient academic knowledge and professional skills to teach the curriculum effectively' (Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 1980, cited in Kunje and Chimombo, 1999). The teacher education curriculum comprises all subjects offered in the primary schools and the skills and competencies teachers would need to teach these subjects. The teacher education curriculum aims to train each teacher in nine skills as follows:

- Introduce a topic competently
- Use sequential steps in the development of a lesson
- Conclude a lesson effectively
- Keep children interested in instruction
- Adapt the instruction to cater for individual differences
- Give clear instructions

² The Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's policy document, which proposes policies and programs that will guide the development of the education sector for the period between 2000 and 2015.

- Explain clearly
- Use questions to stimulate thinking
- Communicate with children using a variety of methods.

(Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 1980 cited in Kunje and Chimombo, 1999, p. 50)

Prior to the introduction of Outcomes Based Curriculum in the primary teacher education in 2006, teacher-training programs mainly used ‘traditional’ approaches. Traditional approaches are teacher-centred, use behaviourist assumptions, and have a relatively closed view of knowledge that sees the teacher as a technician directing all the teaching and learning (Kunje & Chimombo, 1999). These authors characterize a typical teacher education class by the teacher’s use of transmission of knowledge and rote-learning methods intermingled with question and answer sessions, with some rudimentary group work.

In their teaching experience, trainee teachers are observed to teach as they were trained. The trainee teachers’ lessons start with a recap of the previous lesson. They tend not to review the current lesson at the end. Most lessons tend to end abruptly without summaries and without guidance for preparing for the next lesson. There is little evaluation to judge how much learners have actually absorbed. There is also little encouragement for learners to argue or challenge (Kunje and Chimombo, 1999). The Initial Professional Teacher Education Reform (IPTER) of 2006 introduced the ‘progressive’ methods. These methods contain some elements of interactive and constructive thinking, are more learner-centred, less authoritarian and expect more of a teacher in terms of adapting the curriculum to the pupils. The style of teacher-training may influence the methodologies adopted in teaching curriculum subjects including Life skills.

2.2.3.3 The inception and development of Life Skills Education program

In 1999 Malawi's Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and the Malawi Institute of Education, with United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) support, developed a Life skills curriculum that was piloted in 24 primary schools. Following the successful trial testing of the curriculum, in 2000, the Ministry of Education directed that the subject should be implemented in all classes of the primary education cycle (Standard 1-8) as a *non-examinable* subject. Through learning Life skills, learners are expected to develop skills including decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, self-esteem, self-awareness, assertiveness, peer pressure resistance, coping with emotions, coping with stress, interpersonal relationship, planning, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, empathy and peaceful conflict resolution. The Life skills are to address social difficulties which the youth in Malawi face including HIV and AIDS, drug and substance use and abuse, violence and delinquency, harmful cultural practices, human rights (children's rights) and gender issues.

2.2.3.4 Training of teachers in Life skills Education

The Life skills Education program was introduced in the teacher training colleges only in 2006 'to reinforce the messages related to the social impact and coping strategies of the HIV/AIDS epidemic' (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 23 cited in Banda, 2002). Up to 2005, the curriculum offered in the teacher-training colleges were English, Maths, Science, Health Education, General-Studies, Agriculture, Chichewa, Home-Economics, Music, Physical Education, Creative Arts, Religious Education, Foundation Studies and Teaching Experience. This means that teachers who studied before 2006 would not have received any Life skills Education training as part of their pre-service training.

The Life skills Education teacher in Malawi receives in-service training through a cascade model where a national core team of trainers, consisting of Education Methods Advisers and curriculum developers, orients trainers of teachers at district level. The national core team of trainers then trains the Primary Education Methods Advisers in a three day block. The Primary

Education Methods Advisers in turn train school principals and Standards 1-4 teachers in two day blocks. School principals are trained to offer professional support to those teachers in their schools who have not been trained in the teaching of Life skills but teach the subject.

A study in Zimbabwe on challenges facing the implementation of a Life skills program (Rembe, 2006) point to the cascade model of teacher training as one of the challenges in the implementation of the program. He notes that ‘the cascade training strategy of teachers is disappointing because few teachers are chosen and receive training and they in turn, train others in schools and this leads to the required information not to be transmitted properly and it consequently fails to equip teachers with the requisite skills’ (p. 243). The poor preparation of teachers under the cascade approach was further undermined by the short duration of the courses (one to three days). Deep conceptual content knowledge and skill development requires significantly more time.

2.2.3.5 Teaching Life skills

The Life skills Education Syllabus and the Teachers’ Guide suggest teachers use participatory teaching and learning methods in which learners identify their own problems, discuss solutions, plan and carry out effective action programs (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2006 p. 90). The participatory teaching and learning methods assume that learning is best achieved by requiring learners to be actively involved during lessons. Influential cognitive psychologists, like Piaget (1896-1980) believe that pupils learn by constructing their own knowledge. The participatory teaching and learning methods recommended for the teaching of Life skills Education include teaching strategies such as case studies, brainstorming, field visits, panel discussion, story telling, songs, group discussion, debate, posters, role play, games, projects, poetry recitals and drama.

Literature on the teaching of Life skills suggest that the subject is different from other subjects in that it is particularly concerned with teaching of values. Values are however not learned as other curriculum subjects. Values are better taught by living them. The question which the

subject raises is whether values can be taught, and if so, whether it should be the role of schools to consciously teach them. In answering this question, Krilik (2008, p. 3) argues that ‘values are learned’ as they do not ‘pass from parents to children in the form of DNA’. Learners learn values through observing and imitating their teachers’ behaviours (Jansen, 2008, p. 4). Teachers thus need to be role models of good behaviour if they wish their learners to develop the desired values. Thus having a subject like Life skills which teach children what’s wrong or right may not be a guarantee that the children are going to behave accordingly. The teaching of values in Life skills need to be re-enforced by teachers’ professionally appropriate behaviour if children are to develop the desired values. This position is confirmed by Prinsloo (2007) who found that Life Orientation³ programs made little impact on the learners when teachers were not exemplary role models. This means that the teacher’s conduct may undermine what they try to teach. There is some contention therefore about the value of Life skills programs such as the one in Malawi and whether or not such programs are able to achieve their objectives.

2.3 Conceptual framework

Curriculum implementation can be defined as “what actually occurs inside the classroom at the service delivery level” as the teacher translates the officially prescribed courses of study, syllabuses and subjects into actual lessons (Cornbleth, 1990, p.27). In order to assess how effectively Life skills Education is being implemented in Malawi, it is necessary to review literature around curriculum implementation. In particular, I will look at a definition of curriculum implementation and factors that enhance or constrain implementation of a curriculum. In this study, I will primarily adopt Cornbleth’s (1990) and Whitaker’s (1993) notion of curriculum implementation and factors that enhance or constrain implementation of a curriculum.

³ A similar program to Life skills in Malawi is called Life Orientation in South Africa.

2.3.1 Context of curriculum implementation

Implementation of a curriculum may be regarded as successful if learners acquire the planned or intended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas, values and attitudes (Cornbleth, 1990).

However, curriculum implementation does not occur in a contextual vacuum. A curriculum can only be implemented successfully within supportive contexts. Curriculum implementation will be enhanced when impeding aspects of the curriculum context are identified and addressed. There are two types of contexts which will influence the implementation of a curriculum. These contexts are “structural and social”(Cornbleth, 1990, p.27).

2.3.1.1 Structural context of curriculum implementation

Structural context refer to the school organisation and the individual classroom environment. Whitaker (1993) identified key role players involved in the structural context of the organisation as the school principals and district officials. The key role players in the structural context of the classroom environment are the teacher and the learners.

2.3.1.2 Social context of curriculum implementation

Social context on the other hand refers to the school environment at large in which a curriculum is implemented. This environment includes social, political, economic and demographic conditions and demands and priorities of different groups of people who have some role to play in the education activities of an individual school (Cornbleth, 1990, p.27). Whitaker (1993) identified key role players involved in the social context of the school environment at large as the learners and parents or the community members of a school. Learners are also role players in the social context of the school environment at large because learners come from the community. The learners bring some of the strengths and constraints to their learning situation from their homes or communities. The learners’ home background in terms of the social conditions of the communities where these learners come from is one of the major determinants of a learner’s success.

The community or the society influence curriculum implementation in that the community has its own perceptions of what the product of the school system should be. This makes educators or teachers to interpret and present curriculum material in a way that takes into account these societal considerations. If this is not does not happen, the implementation of a curriculum meets some resistance. For example, some societies may feel that teaching subjects such as sex education in the schools will undermine their belief systems. The same community would not tolerate a curriculum that does not include religious and moral education. The success of the implementation of a curriculum may therefore also depend on the extent to which the presentation of the curriculum material in the classroom accommodates the culture of the society that the curriculum is seeking to serve. It is therefore possible for the community to have both positive and negative influences on the implementation of a curriculum.

The political conditions of the role players within the social context of the school environment at large include the national ideology and philosophy of the government of the day. National ideology and philosophy have a tremendous influence on the education system. Curriculum materials and their interpretation and presentation are usually heavily influenced by political considerations. For example, one of the reasons why education is financed by the government is to improve the country's economy. The government may therefore put emphasis on those subjects which it feels will develop skills, knowledge base and attitudes in learners required by the industry. The government may ask the teachers to put serious consideration and more teaching and learning time on those subjects. This may result in teachers paying more attention to those subjects which are seen to be the government's priority, at the expense of other curriculum subjects.

Economic conditions refer to the financial standing of both the government of the day and the members of the community themselves. Teachers require classroom supplies such as textbooks, charts and other equipment. Without these materials, learning is compromised. However, these materials need financial resources to buy. The financial standing of the government and the

community would either make these materials to be or not to be available in the schools. Availability or non availability of the materials heavily influences the implementation of a curriculum, that is whether the implementation becomes successful or not.

The demographic conditions refer to the language, race, age and gender characteristics of the community and the learners. Demographic characteristics of the community influence curriculum implementation in that the community can have different groupings for example groupings in terms of gender. These groups can bring their views to bear on curriculum implementation. For example the gender grouping may oppose a curriculum that is gender biased against female children because it includes instructional materials that portray negative attitudes towards women and girls.

The implementers need to plan to consider how the contextual factors may be impeding curriculum implementation and utilize the enhancing aspects of the curriculum context. I will consider each of the role players within the structural and social contexts of the school environment in turn to show how their social, political, economic and demographic conditions influence the way a curriculum is implemented.

2.3.2 Role players within the structural context of the classroom environment

2.3.2.1 Teachers

Teachers are the primary role players within the structural context of the individual classroom environment. The following characteristics and conditions of teachers influence the way a curriculum is implemented.

a. Teacher identity

Successfully bringing an implementation of a curriculum hinges on the teacher's identity or dispositions towards work.

In this study, teacher identity means a ‘teacher’s beliefs, dispositions and interests towards teaching given the conditions of his/her work’ (Jansen, 2002, p.119). The feeling that a teacher has about his/her work shapes his/her ability in implementing a curriculum policy (Jansen, 2002). Kadzamira’s (2006) study notes that low salaries and coupled with other poor working conditions in Malawi cause widespread teacher discontent so teaching is regarded as ‘employment of the last resort.’ Teachers’ discontent with their career may affect their performance and consequently affect the implementation of any curriculum including Life skills Education.

b. Teacher’s content knowledge of the curriculum

Teachers should understand the goals and content of a curriculum document or syllabus well in order to implement it effectively. Teachers who are supposedly implementing a new curriculum sometimes cannot even identify its main features. The greatest difficulty is likely to be encountered when teachers are required to change their educational approaches to teach this new curriculum (Pratt, 1980). Mahlangu (2001) raises a concern about introducing a curriculum to teachers and leaving them to implement without further guidance. Mahlangu argues that such decisions are likely to have profound effects on the success of the implementation. According to Mahlangu, such implementation is likely to waste time, money and effort because the desired outcomes will not be achieved. Mahlangu suggests a planned and systematic approach to implementation. Implementation decisions have to be made by people who know its possible effects on individuals. Mahlangu further argues that innovators should be concerned with the more difficult task of maintenance of the curriculum rather than just introducing it in the schools.

Successful implementation of Life skills Education needs more than just a teacher who has sufficient pedagogical and content knowledge of Life skills Education. As Life skills Education deals with the teaching of values, teachers whose conduct is perceived by learners as inappropriate are unable to be successful facilitators of the program as ‘their high moral

standards are important requisites for the successful implementation of these programs’ (Prinsloo, 2007, p. 160).

Kadzamira’s (2006) study on ‘teacher motivation and incentives’ in Malawi notes that teacher misconduct in Malawi has increased over the past ten years. This is partly due to the poor preparation of teachers in the Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Program (MIITEP), which pays relatively little attention to professional ethics. The unprofessional conduct of some teachers include ‘drug and alcohol abuse, sexual relations with pupils and theft of teaching and learning materials’ (Kadzamira, 2006, p. 25). In 2006, the disappointing examination results for high-stakes examinations for the primary school prompted a Presidential Commission of Inquiry to investigate the reasons behind the low levels of learner performance. The findings of the Commission of Inquiry was that the poor performance of students was in part attributed to the rising indiscipline among teachers through absenteeism and drunkenness (including drinking beer with students), vending activities (to get extra income) and failure to observe social distance with learners of the opposite sex (Kadzamira, 2006). Malawi primary education system has thus a problem which undermines the quality of Malawi’s education system. Certain teachers may be unsuitable to teach Life skills Education even if they had sufficient pedagogical and content knowledge of the subject as their conduct may not make them role models of the values they teach.⁴

c. Teacher Development

The effectiveness of an innovation can only be determined when it is negotiated at the classroom level. The teacher can either make the curriculum succeed or fail. According to Ratsatsi (2005), teachers implement ‘only those aspects of the curriculum that fit well with their beliefs. If the activity does not work it is quickly dropped or radically altered’ (p. 162).

⁴ See section 2.2.3.5

Fullan (1992) concurs with Ratsatsi and argues that individual teachers will implement a new program in ways that are consistent with their own beliefs and practice. On these grounds, Mahlangu (2001) argues that implementation often requires that educators change their traditional roles and give up practices in which they feel secure. Educators are expected to adopt new practices in which they feel insecure. Teacher development in relation to these new learnings is therefore important or else the implementation will not happen (Mahlangu, 2001). However abandoning one's comfort zone is not a straight-forward simple process.

Barnet et al. (1995) study in Pakistan and India on the challenges facing a Life skills program illustrates how teacher development as an economic factor affects the implementation of a curriculum. The study found that training of teachers is considered as an implementation cost. This results in schools selecting teachers who are not trained and sometimes who are also inexperienced and newly qualified to teach the subject and this negatively affects the teaching of the subject.

d. Personal circumstances of teachers

Literature reviewed has shown that teacher personality, identity, knowledge of a curriculum, resistance to change and professional development are factors restricting a teacher's ability to implement a curriculum effectively. In addition a teacher's personal social circumstances such as personal or family health and poverty are also factors that can undermine the implementation of a curriculum. For example, Lowe (2008) argues that many teachers in Malawi are constrained by social circumstances such as caring for sick children, personal ill-health (including HIV/AIDS) and a meager income. These social circumstances often cause teachers to absent themselves from work. Describing teacher absences in Malawi, Lowe (2008), explains that

“At the first school I visited there should have been five teachers present, but three, including the principal, were absent on that day. If we add to this the claimed number of

classes with no teachers at all, we see reasons why children might lose interest in school”
(p. 18).

A teacher’s personal circumstances can therefore either inhibit or enhance the implementation of a curriculum.

To sum up, teachers are key players in the implementation of a curriculum because they are the ones who introduce a curriculum into the classroom. The success of a curriculum mainly hinges upon a teacher’s commitment to a curriculum, the teacher’s sound knowledge of the goals and content knowledge of the curriculum, teacher’s knowledge about the practice of teaching the curriculum, and suitable personal social circumstances. Such personal circumstances include personal and family health and sound finances.

2.3.2.2 The Learners

Learners are also important role players within both the structural context of the individual classroom environment and the social context in which a curriculum is implemented. The following characteristics of learners influence the implementation of a curriculum.

Learners also play a crucial role in successful implementation of a curriculum innovation. Just as teachers must accept a curriculum for it to be successful, so learners must also be willing to participate in the curriculum for it to be successful (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). It is only when learners react to the experiences they encounter in the curriculum with cooperation that a successful implementation of a curriculum can be ensured at classroom level. If learners see little relevance in the curriculum activities planned, they are ‘not going to be motivated to participate or learn’ (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993, p. 317). There are of course other physical and psycho-social factors affecting learners which may affect their participation in the curriculum and consequently undermine the implementation of a curriculum. I will consider each of these learner physical and psycho-social factors in turn.

a. Language and learning

Language also affects learners' learning of curriculum subjects. Language is the means by which ideas are conveyed between teacher and pupil. Learning will therefore take place only in cases where a language that both a teacher and a child understand is used in the classroom. For example, learners whose home language is not the same as the language of instruction have been found to have more problems with learning of curriculum subjects (Fleisch, 2008). The problem is compounded when the learners are taught by a teacher whose home language is not that of the learners. Pupils may not understand some concepts or issues in lessons taught in a 'foreign' language. Such concepts or issues will only be understood if translated into the learners' home language ('mother tongue'). A teacher whose home language is not that of the learners may not be able to do so (Lowe, 2008; Fleisch, 2008).

b. Learners' Behaviour

Learners' behaviour affects their learning of curriculum subjects. For example, a study (Prinsloo, 2007) in South Africa indicate that learners' behaviour outside the school premises is one of the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills programs. Prinsloo found the effect of Life skills lessons only extend to school times. When they are out of school, learners are influenced by their peers. The learners engage in behaviours such as alcoholism, drug abuse, criminal activities and sexual relationships – undermining the potential of Life skills Education program to be influential.

2.3.3 Other factors within the structural context of the classroom environment influencing curriculum implementation

Apart from teachers and learners as key role players in influencing the way a curriculum is implemented within the structural context of the classroom environment, there are also other factors such as resources and assessment which also influence the implementation of a

curriculum within the structural context of the classroom environment. I will consider each of these two factors in turn to show how they influence the implementation of a curriculum.

2.3.3. 1 Resource Materials and Facilities

Resource materials and facilities influence the implementation of a curriculum in that the availability and quality of resource material and facilities have a great influence on curriculum implementation (Whitaker, 1993, p. 26). Kadzamira (2006) indicates that ‘the primary school system in Malawi faces the challenge of lack of facilities such as staffrooms, classrooms, teaching and learning materials especially the rural primary school’ (p. 26). Lowe (2008) also found that there were not enough text books in the schools he studied in Zomba district in Malawi.

2.3. 3.2 Assessment

Assessment in the form of examinations influences curriculum implementation in that due to the great value given to public examination certificates by communities and schools, teachers tend to concentrate on subjects that are examinable and are thought to promote academic excellence. This can affect the achievement of the broad goals and objectives of the curriculum (Whitaker, 1993).

Rooth’s (2005) study in South Africa indicates that Life Orientation is not being taken seriously because it is not an examinable subject. In some cases, it is not being taught at all despite the fact that it is included on the timetable. In other schools, it is not even included on the timetable. The non-examinable status of Life Orientation in South Africa is thus undermining its implementation.

2.3.4 Role players within the structural context of the school organization

2.3.4.1 School principals

School principals are role players within the structural context of school organisation.

Principals contribute to the successful implementation of a curriculum if they fulfil their role as “curriculum and instructional leaders” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993, p. 319). In their role as “curriculum and instructional leaders” the principals are expected to ‘spend time visiting teachers in the classroom, plan staff development programs and modify school environment to improve instruction’ (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993, p. 319).

Under the Life skills program in Malawi, training was organized at the outset of the Life skills program to orient principals and their deputies to the teaching of Life skills and to sensitize them to the philosophy underlying school-based support to untrained Life skills teachers (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2000a). Principals are then expected to take a major role in the training processes of the Life skills teachers in their schools. They are expected to take a major role in the training processes of Life skills teachers.

Prinsloo (2007) in South Africa found that a lack of commitment by some school principals to make the program a success at the school level is a challenge facing the implementation of the Life skills program. Some principals indicated that it was difficult for them to support the implementation of Life skills because many learners in their schools are ‘careless, irresponsible and have no vision or mission in life’ (p.10). The principals felt that there was little impact Life skills Education could make on the learners even if the principals provided some support for the teaching of the subject in their schools. The principals’ excuse for their lack of commitment to make the Life skills program a success in their schools may be considered as a defeatist attitude; they were blaming learners for the problems in their schools.

2.3. 4.2 Supervisors and Curriculum Directors

Supervisors⁵ are also key role players within the structural context of the school organisation. Supervision by District Education officers plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of a curriculum. Supervisors need to monitor both the manner of teaching and the content that is actually being addressed by the teacher in the classroom (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). It is the role of supervisors to provide direction and guidance to teachers on how to implement the curriculum effectively. The supervisor checks that teachers have the required knowledge and skills by observing classrooms to identify the needs of teachers as they implement the curriculum. If supervisors are effective, it is more likely that teachers ‘will feel committed to and comfortable with the curriculum being implemented’ (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993, p. 318). The duties of supervisors should include ‘organising staff development meetings where they can conduct some practical demonstration of how to go about teaching the contents of a curriculum’ (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1993, p. 318). In Malawi, Primary Education Methods Advisors (PEAs) are the supervisors of curriculum implementation activities. Their major role is to ‘visit schools regularly to guide and advise school staff on good practice in teaching’ (Kadyoma, 2003, p. 136). The Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) are expected to monitor the teaching of Life skills Education. In cases where the teachers experience difficulties in teaching the subject, the supervisors are expected to advise the teachers appropriately on how best they can teach the subject.

Curriculum Directors on the other hand are ‘the full time centralized directors who oversee the entire curriculum activities’ (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993, p. 318). They spearhead the development of a curriculum. Directors of curriculum can assist teachers in implementing a curriculum effectively by organising teacher development activities in which they can furnish teachers and principals with pedagogic and content knowledge of a curriculum. The curriculum directors also need to train school principals in supervising instruction of the curriculum in the

⁵ District Education officers

classroom (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). In the case of Malawi, the Malawi Institute of Education is the national curriculum development centre, the curriculum director in the country. Malawi Institute of Education may be expected to perform the roles described above in order to enhance effective implementation of Life skills Education.

2.3.5 Other factors within the structural context of the school organization influencing curriculum implementation

2.3.5.1 The School Context

Schools located in affluent socio-economic environments and those that have adequate human and material resources can implement the curriculum to an extent that would be difficult or impossible for schools in poor economic environments (Whitaker, 1993).

Kadzamira (2006, p. 10) notes that the working environment in the majority of schools in Malawi is ‘deplorable with dilapidated school structures and large classes. These daunting conditions contribute to teacher discontentment with their work.’ The low morale of teachers may affect their performance and consequently affect the implementation of any curriculum subject including Life skills Education. For example, Lowe (2008) explains that classes over 60 reduce the ability of teachers to teach and pupils to learn; the World Bank (1998) has recommended that classes should be no larger than 40 in the primary school in sub-Saharan Africa. In contrast, Lowe (2008, p. 19) found that ‘in the 4 schools sampled, the average class size was 68’.

Prinsloo’s (2007) study in South Africa also notes that overcrowding in the classrooms acts as a barrier in the process of teaching curriculum subjects. Prinsloo quotes one teacher involved in his study on the implementation of Life Orientation as arguing that ‘to reach 40 or more learners at the same time in a short period is a difficult task’. This comment reveals a

perception that teachers feel that they are not always able to create an atmosphere of personal trust between themselves and all the learners in their class.

2.3.6 Role players within the social context of the school environment influencing curriculum implementation

2.3.6.1 Parents and Community members

Parents and community members are key role players within the social context of the school environment at large in which a curriculum is implemented. Parents and community members' social characteristics such as their beliefs and their demographic characteristics such as levels of literacy influence the implementation of a curriculum.

Parents and community members play a role in the implementation of a curriculum through their involvement in their children's schooling. For example, Lowe (2008) noted that many adults in Malawi are not able to contribute to their children's school learning because they are illiterate, having had little or no education themselves. The ability of parents to support schooling of their children will therefore facilitate or undermine the implementation of a curriculum.

Parents and community members also play a role in the implementation of a curriculum because schools are considered to belong to the community and are not the possession of educators. Parents and community members may have a say on what is being offered to learners in the schools in given communities. Parents may influence learners to reject subjects or courses they consider detrimental to the interests of the community group. The 2006 findings of the Malawi Institute of Education survey on the implementation of Life skills Education in Standards 5-8 of primary school illustrates the influence parents and community members have in the implementation of a curriculum implementation. Parents argued that it was immoral for primary school children to be taught the human sexual and reproductive content in the curriculum. The Ministry of Education decided to proceed with the implementation despite

parents' concerns. This undermined the effective implementation of the curriculum and has resulted in the topics on human sexual and reproductive issues in the Life skills program not being taught at all in some primary schools (Kishindo, Mzumara & Katundulu, 2006).

International literature acknowledges conflict between community and curriculum. In South Africa for example, Rooth (2005) indicates that sexuality education in Life Orientation/Life skills receives resistance from certain religious groups. Numerous letters to the media and public comments on the Revised National Curriculum Statement indicate resistance to HIV/AIDS and sexuality education. Similarly, Prinsloo (2007) indicates that there is lack of parent involvement in their children's learning process to ensure successful implementation of Life Orientation, a Life skills program. This lack of linkage between home and school limits the learning of children. Principals indicated some reasons for parents not getting involved in their children's learning – impoverished parents, struggling to feed and clothe their families, lacked the energy to become involved in school matters; but affluent parents, overly concerned with their careers, did not spend much quality time with their children.

Barnet et al's (1995) study in Pakistan and India found a lack of links between schools and organizations working with in-school youth and health-services. Consequently, formal and non-formal education did not support each other. Barnet notes that successful school AIDS education programs – able to demonstrate influences on health behaviour and impact on health outcomes – have been directly linked to locally available health services. Barnet argues that links with the health sector are vital for in-service training of teachers.

2.3.7 Other factors within the social context of the school environment influencing curriculum implementation

2.3.7.1 Poverty and learning

Poverty affects learners' learning of curriculum subjects. For example, studies done in Malawi by Lowe (2008) and in South Africa by Fleisch (2008) identify poverty and language as two of

the factors restricting a learner's ability to learn what is taught. Lowe and Fleisch concur that the most impoverished learners are those in the rural countryside who 'because of hunger which they are feeling, the learners do not concentrate on what is happening in class' (Lowe, 2005, p. 15). Similarly, 'sometimes, they come to school inadequately dressed, without a jersey or shoes. When a child is shivering, he does not learn well. He will not listen to the teacher or concentrate on what the teacher is doing because of the cold that he is feeling' (Fleisch, 2008, p. 36). Apart from poverty and hunger, learners in Africa are also affected by diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. Describing the effect of HIV/AIDS on schooling in Malawi, Lowe (2008, p. 15) explains that 'the large numbers of children who are made orphans by HIV/AIDS are usually farmed out to the grandparents, or to other more distant relatives, who have less interest in their education than in their 'free' labour' (p. 15). Lack of food and illness are some of the major reasons for poor attendance of learners at school. Similarly, a study (Prinsloo, 2007) in South Africa on challenges facing the implementation of Life skills program indicated that many teachers were not able to handle issues of HIV/AIDS and they avoided engaging pupils on the subject. Teachers failed to engage the learners on HIV/AIDS content in the curriculum because they feel that it is sensitive to teach that which affect their learners. Thus although curriculum designers may plan that all the content they put in the curriculum document should be taught to learners, the actual implementation of the curriculum may not necessarily be as planned. Both teacher and learner factors may lead the teacher to either radically change what was initially planned or even drop some content.

Apart from hunger and illness, the cost of education is another constraint on learners' learning of the curriculum subjects. For example, Lowe (2008) notes that although primary education in Malawi is 'free', in reality, it is not free. There are direct costs of schooling such as costs of notebooks, clothing and other essentials such as soap. For poorer families these costs becomes too much and the pupils give up school as schooling is not compulsory in Malawi.

2.4 Closing remarks

It is evident from the factors which influence the implementation of a curriculum presented above that if a curriculum has to yield the intended results, it is important for curriculum designers to understand the reasons why so many curricula fail at the implementation stage. The designers of a curriculum therefore should be concerned with the more difficult task of minimising those factors that will constrain a successful implementation of a curriculum rather than limiting their horizon to producing the curriculum and introducing it in the schools.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the method that was used for the research, including a discussion of the participants and how the data was collected and analysed.

3.2 Type of study

3.2.1 Qualitative research approach

A qualitative research design employing a case study approach was used in this study.

This study fits into the qualitative research category. Qualitative research is interested in gaining insight into and understanding of a phenomenon. One of the assumptions of qualitative research is that multiple realities are socially constructed through individual and collective definitions of a situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). The present study assumed that the Life skills teachers constructed realities in their classrooms individually and through interactions with learners. In so doing, they adapted, transformed or interpreted a curriculum to suit their situation. Also qualitative research could be described as an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This study satisfies these descriptions in that I collected data in the natural setting and engaged in interpretation in order to construct meaning from the data. Among the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to illuminate the particulars of human experience in the context of a common phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). It enables collection of multiple accounts of a common experience across participants as well as individual accounts in specific contexts. The aim of this study was to explore the challenges facing the implementation of the Life skills program. I felt that this aim was consistent with those of the qualitative research approach.

3.2.2 A collective case study approach

This study used a case study approach. In a *case study*, a single case is studied in depth, which could be an individual, a group, an institution, a programme or a concept (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). The strength of this design lies in its potential to enable the study of things in detail (Denscombe, 2003). With case studies, it is possible to gain a unique perspective of a single individual or group (Denscombe, 2003). It can also explain why certain things happen. This study is a case study because I focused on 6 particular teachers and principals in 4 schools. I sought to investigate Life skills implementation with specific teachers within specific contexts. I used collective case study in that 6 teachers were studied in depth. Stake (2000), refers to a study extending to several cases as a *collective case study* (Stake, 2000). Stake (2000, p. 437) further argues that in a collective case study, individual cases are selected because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorising about a still larger collection of cases. The use of multiple cases in this study created opportunities for within- case and across-case approaches of data analysis (Denscombe, 2003) to be done. Case studies however are faulted for questionable credibility of generalisations. There is a perception that there is a general difficulty in defining boundaries of the cases, problems of negotiating access to study settings and the effect of the observer on the natural setting (Denscombe, 2003). However, this is a simplistic way of looking at case studies based on some misunderstandings. I feel one such misunderstanding could be the belief that all research should always aim at generalisable findings. Such a belief negates the important role that specific information about particular cases plays in understanding phenomena.

3.3 Sampling method and sample size

I selected the setting or site of the research and schools that I felt would provide the desired data. The study thus used purposeful sampling of the participating education district and

schools because the education district, schools and the grade level studied were selected for particular reasons. The study sample and the reasons for their selection to be studied are described below.

3.3.1 District sample

The district studied in the research is Zomba district. The district was selected because it benefits most from the local national curriculum development centre because the centre normally pilots its educational innovation programs in the district's schools. Also the centre uses the district's schools to identify teachers' needs in the implementation of curriculum innovations. The centre also pilots its in-service teacher education programs in the schools of the district. Most program activities related to the improvement of the quality of education conducted by the Faculty of Education of Chancellor College, University of Malawi's main campus, are piloted in the schools of Zomba district. The Malawi National Examinations Board, located in the district, also pilots its related program activities in the schools of the district. The primary school teachers of the district therefore are privileged to learn from the three educational stronghold institutions located in the district. The chances therefore are that the schools in Zomba district are likely to implement curriculum innovations more successfully than schools in other districts in the country. It is likely that if schools in Zomba district face challenges in implementing the Life skills Education curriculum, then challenges in schools in other districts may be similar or worse.

The district further provides good context for evaluation of an education program because the rural and urban schools in the district provide to a certain extent a picture of schools and classrooms in Malawi. It is likely that any implementation challenges or successes related to physical facilities may also apply to schools in the other remaining 27 districts.

3.3.2 School sample

The participating schools in the study were chosen for specific reason. The main reason being that two of the schools were to be those located in the rural area and the other two were to be those located in the urban area. Four contrasting state schools therefore, in the names of Bango, Chaje, Ndiwo and Madzi were selected for the study⁶. Bango and Chaje schools are located within a rural area and are poorly resourced in terms of basic resources such as electricity, telephone, sanitation, school infrastructure and seating facilities.

Madzi and Ndiwo schools are located in the urban area and are adequately resourced in terms of basic facilities such as electricity, sanitation facilities, school infrastructure (buildings) and seating facilities. Ndiwo school is located at a Teacher Development Centre (TDC), where teacher professional development activities take place. It seems likely that the presence of the TDC would positively affect teacher's knowledge, perceptions, understanding of Life skills Education and teaching practice of the subject.

Bango school in the sample was chosen on the basis of being a high performing school in the national examinations compared to the other three schools in the sample. It seems likely that the high performing school has good teachers and if such a school is having challenges in teaching Life skills Education, then the other schools in the district which are not as high performers may have greater problems or challenges in teaching the subject.

3.3.3 Teacher sample

In all, six teachers were studied in the research. My choice to study Standard 4 was also purposeful. Standard 4 was the first targeted class for Life skills Education because 'statistical figures showed that this was typically the terminal class for most children and it was important that children be equipped with the necessary skills for them to prevent contraction of HIV/AIDS before they drop out of school' (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology,

⁶ Pseudonyms have been used in this study

2000a, p. 23). The Ministry of Education attaches a lot of value to Standard 4 Life skills Education for the reason I have stated above, hence the particular need for the subject to be effectively taught and achieve its objectives in this class.

At both Ndiwo and Chaje schools, two teachers are used in Standard 4 to cater for large class sizes. The teachers assist one another in class management and do team teaching. I interviewed four Life skills teachers in these two urban schools. I however only observed two lessons of the two whose turn it was to teach at the time of my data collection, according to their team teaching arrangement. I targeted Life skills Education teachers in Standard 4 regardless of whether they were trained in the teaching of the subject or not.

Teachers' ages range from 30 to 40 (two teachers withheld their ages). Five of the teachers in this study are females and only one is male. All the teachers have minimum qualifications for their positions as teachers in the primary school and were relatively experienced. Five had more than 10 years and one less than five years experience. Only two teachers were trained in the normal training program of the teaching of the subject.

The teachers who participated in the study are presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Teachers of Life skills Education biographical data

Teacher	Gender	Age	Professional Qualification	Teaching Experience	In-service orientation training in teaching Life skills	School where teaching
Chimtengo	Male	40	T2*	16 years	Not trained	Rural school
Nasibeko	Female	unknown	POE**	20 years	Not trained	Urban school
M'thiko	Female	unknown	POE**	17 years	Trained	Urban school
Chiutsi	Female	35 years	T2*	2 years	Not trained	Rural school
Wakwathu	Female	33 years	T2*	11 years	Trained	Urban school

Leka-leka	Female	35 years	T2*	15 years	Not trained	Urban school
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* a teaching certificate for those who entered teacher training as holders of Malawi School Certificate of Education (Form 4).

** Professional Officer Extended. A teaching certificate awarded to those who did a three year Diploma in Education course at the University of Malawi.

3.3.4 School principals' sample

The four school principals from the four sample schools were interviewed.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This study was conducted after permission was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand ethics committee. Ethical procedures were adhered to. After the approached participants agreed to participate, informed consent was first sought from them. Participants were informed of the confidentiality in the study. Confidentiality was to ensure respect for the dignity of participants in the study. Therefore it was important that participants had no doubt that any identifying information provided would be regarded as confidential. Participants were informed that their confidential information would only be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor. They were also not required to provide any identifying details and as such, transcripts and the final report will not reflect the subjects identifying information such as their names, although certain participants were comfortable with their personal details being printed. After transcribing, the tapes were kept in a safe place, after the study has been completed and a final report written, the tapes will be destroyed. Samples of Consent forms have been attached as appendices of this report.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Two methods were used to collect data on the research questions. These data gathering methods were interviews and classroom lesson observations. I chose these methods because I felt that they would provide the necessary information that would enable me to gain insight into an understanding of the challenges facing the teaching of the Life skills programme. The methods were also chosen because I felt that they accord or are consistent with the ideal qualitative research methods. Furthermore, the two methods complemented each other to provide methodological triangulation (Cohen & Manion, 1986) in the study. Methodological triangulation helps to cross check the reliability of the data of a study. There were three types of interviews conducted in the study. These were initial or before lesson observation teacher interviews, follow up lesson observation interviews and principals' interviews. The questions posed in the interviews are presented in Appendix 1. The interviews were individual and "semi-structured." The study adopted individual interviews over group interviews because I wanted the interviewees to have more freedom to express their thoughts especially on issues in the Life skills program regarded as sensitive by some communities in Malawi. I felt that some teachers and principals would not be free to express themselves openly on the sensitive issues if interviewed in a group. The interviews used in this study are characterised as being "semi-structured" because they were open ended or flexible. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer generally starts with some defined questioning plan, but pursue a more conversational style that may see questions answered in an order merely natural to the flow of conversation. The interviewee on the other hand has the freedom to say whatever comes to mind (Cohen and Manion, 1986). I followed the procedure of semi-structured interviews as described by Cohen and Manion (1986) above in interviewing the teachers and the school principals.

The methods of data collection used in this study are described below.

3.5.1 Initial (before lesson observation) teacher interview

Initial interviews with Standard 4 teachers were used to investigate the nature of the career development of the teachers and their perceptions of their job, the goals of the Life skills program, their working practices in the teaching of the program and challenges facing the teaching of the program and how they were coping in their work. The data was captured through tape recordings which were then transcribed. Field notes during interviews were taken using long hand.

3.5.2 Lesson observations of teachers teaching Life skills

Education

Observations of two lessons per teacher were conducted. In the classrooms, timed and detailed notes were made about what the teacher and the learners were doing.

3.5.3 Follow up interviews.

Immediately after completing lesson observations follow up interviews with the teachers were conducted. Teachers were asked to discuss their lessons with me in order for me to probe their interpretations of what happened in the lesson. The follow up interview data triangulated with the pre-lesson observation interview data to increase the reliability and validity of the data of the study.

3.5.4 Principals' interviews

Interviews were conducted with principals at each school on the support which is provided at school level to the teachers of Life skills Education, the status of the subject at the school and in the community and standard of teaching of the Life skills teachers. The data was captured through tape recording of the interviews which was transcribed for future reference. I jotted notes of what transpired in the interviews. The data was triangulated with data from teacher interviews and lesson observations to add to the authenticity of its interpretation.

3.6 The reliability and validity of the data of the study

Triangulation is commonly used in education research as a means of countering the selective bias of a single view. It involves the use of multiple methods of data collection in order to cross-check and to support methods which do not provide adequate data (Yin, 1984). In order to increase the reliability and validity of the data of the study therefore, I made use of multiple sources of data which cross checked irregularities within the data and added more credibility to it. The multiple sources of data thus used were initial (pre-lesson observation) interviews for teachers, interviews with school principals, observed lessons and post-lesson observation interviews with teachers.

3.7 Data analysis method

Results were analysed using the thematic content analysis method (Stake, 1995). Stake describes this method of data analysis as a way of analysing data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. Using this model of data analysis, the interview and class observation data were first coded using different colours. Coding is the process of dividing or segmenting data into topics or categories. The different colours represented different themes. The themes used were broadly related to the different factors that influence the implementation of a curriculum identified by Cornbleth (1990), Whitaker (1993) and Ornstein and Hunkins (1993). The coding procedure assisted in reducing and categorising large quantity of data into more meaningful units for interpretation. After the coding, I presented the factors that influence the implementation of the Life skills curriculum in Standard 4, in four schools in the Zomba district in order for me to answer my research questions.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The following are regarded as the limitations of this study.

- It was not easy for me to interview the teachers and the school principals without influencing their responses in order for me to get particular information from them. This is because I am one of the curriculum developers of the curriculum under study. I have developed pre-conceived ideas of how this curriculum is expected to be implemented from my participation in the drafting process and this may have in a small way biased the data I collected. However, in order for me to remain as neutral as possible so as to reduce chances of influencing the participants' responses, I asked open ended questions and this minimized the influence of my position on the data I was collecting.
- The schools were told in advance of the visit to observe lessons and so teachers could prepare lessons for the researcher. The lessons observed may therefore not be a true reflection of the normal practice in teaching Life skills Education. It is therefore possible that I did not observe Life skills lessons as they really are in an authentic context.
- Only two lessons for each teacher were observed. This is not enough for anyone to generalise about the real practice of teachers in teaching Life skills Education.
- The study has only looked into four schools and six teachers out of the huge number of schools and teachers in Zomba district. Therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalized but they provide insight into the factors that act as barriers to successful implementation of Life skills Education within specific contexts.
- The teachers who I interviewed and observed were aware that I am an employee of the Malawi Ministry of Education's National Curriculum Development Centre. Some of their

interview responses therefore aimed to show me their needs as Life skills Education teachers and it would seem that they expected me to provide help immediately.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the study. The results will be presented in relation to the role-players involved in the implementation of a curriculum. These role-players include the teacher, learner, principals and district education officers. Other factors influencing curriculum implementation would include the status of a subject, resources and school context factors.

4.2 Teacher factors influencing the implementation of Life skills Education

4.2.1 Teacher identity

Five of the teachers in this study indicated that they were influenced by other people (brother, father, fiancée, former teacher) to become teachers. Most of these teachers indicate that they have now accepted teaching as their career. For example, Wakwathu who indicated that she took up teaching as a last resort after being unsuccessful at securing another type of employment remarked, *“I have now forgotten about nursing which I wanted to be. I am happy to teach. In fact, I see myself as born a teacher.”* M’thiko, who was forced into a teaching career by her father remarked, *“It has taken me so long to accept teaching as my job and I still cannot say that I like teaching.”* M’thiko’s unhappiness with her choice of career is observable in her teaching. For example, in the observed lessons, Nasibeko taught while M’thiko assisted with keeping learners quiet and listening. However, M’thiko went out of the class room half way through the lesson and could be seen wandering outside the classroom. She seemed disinterested in the processes of teaching and learning happening during the lesson. Such lack

of interest can undermine the implementation of subjects in the curriculum including Life skills Education.

Two of the teachers in the study saw the working conditions in teaching as frustrating their passion to do their best in the job. For example, Nasibeko remarked that the low salary “*affects my enthusiasm for teaching*”. Teachers’ response to their working conditions is affecting their teaching of some subjects in the curriculum. For example, Chimtengo remarked that, “*I do not have an institutional house like my friends. I walk long distance from my house to school. When I come to school, there is a lot of work to do again. This makes me very exhausted... I just put much effort on teaching Maths, English and Chichewa.*”⁷ Chimtengo’s remarks suggest that teachers are working in difficult conditions and strained with heavy workload for little pay. This persuades even motivated and committed teachers to give more attention to (what they perceive as) priority subjects such as Maths and Languages, rather than Life skills Education.

4.2.2 Teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the goals of Life skills program

All the six teachers in the sample were able to identify the goals of Life skills Education. The teachers mentioned the goals in the program’s documents. For example, Nasibeko explains that “*the subject is aimed at equipping learners with skills of decision making when they are confronted with everyday social problems*”.

Simply knowing the goals of the program is not sufficient for teaching Life skills Education successfully. Teachers also need to transform the goals into learning experiences so that learners understand their social difficulties and develop skills to cope with these difficulties. I therefore sought to learn through lesson observations whether the learning experiences covered

⁷ Chichewa is the local language.

the goals of the program and the extent to which the teachers use those participatory⁸ methods suggested in the Life skills curriculum as to promote the learning of skills and values. The following section presents the findings on what teachers were observed to do in teaching the subject.

Of the observed lessons, only Wakwathu's lesson explicitly addressed the goals of Life skills Education. For example, Wakwathu discussed ways of getting money. She linked this discussion to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, one of the goals of Life skills Education. She did this by asking her learners to discuss "*how some ways of getting money can lead one to contract HIV/AIDS.*" This prompted her learners to identify the risks associated with prostitution, for example contraction of HIV/AIDS.

In the other lessons observed, teachers focussed more on developing language and comprehension than learners' life skills. For example, Chimtengo asked questions such as "*How many people are mentioned in the story? Which day of the week did this story take place? Where did the story take place?*" These questions tested more of the learners' comprehension skills than helping them to learn about social difficulties and skills. Thus although Chim'tengo was able to articulate the goals of Life skills Education, his lessons observed were more aligned with the goals of language lessons. Teachers not addressing the goals of Life skills program makes the lessons ineffective and undermines the implementation of the program.

These teachers however feel that their conceptual knowledge and understanding of Life skills program is somehow limited by the difficult language of the Teachers' Guide. For example, Nasibeko explained that, "*Some of the sections in the Teachers' Guide are very difficult to understand. I sometimes find teaching Life skills lessons very difficult as I have to use the*

⁸ Methods such as case studies, posters, story telling, songs, debate; posters, role play, games, poetry recitals, future's wheels, drama and values clarification, which the Life skills curriculum advocates as helping learners to identify their social difficulties and discuss solutions.

Teachers' Guide. I sometimes consult colleagues to help me understand these sections or I sometimes just skip them. I do not teach them". Since some teachers may be unable to understand some sections of the Guide, they therefore skip those sections. This may result in the omission of some most critical issues, and undermines the implementation of Life skills Education.

Two teachers in the sample feel that there is a mismatch between the age of learners and some content in the Life skills program so they skip teaching some content in the program. For example, Chiutsi feels that the material on sexual relationships is not suited to 9-10 year olds and it is against their culture for them to talk of human sexual reproductive organs and sexual intercourse to young children. She has therefore chosen not to teach about sexual relationships as she remarked, *"it is not good for a grown up person like me to be talking about sexual relationships and sexual intercourse to small children like these. I skip the content which deals with sexual intercourse. This material is not suited to the age of the children."* Chiutsi's action of skipping content prevents her from addressing the goals of Life skills Education. This may affect a successful implementation of the program.

4.2.3 Teacher's methods in teaching Life skills Education

The Life skills Education Teachers' Guide advises the use of a variety of participatory methods⁹. However in the lessons observed, teachers mainly used just group discussion. For example, Nasibeko describes the way she structures her lessons as follows, *"I introduce the lesson by explaining the topic of the day. I then put learners in groups with one of the learners as a leader in each group. I give them work to do. I tell them to report to the whole class what they have discussed. I then summarise the main points from the group reports."* The other teachers' lessons followed a similar pattern. They started their lessons with a recap of the previous lesson. They then put learners in groups for a short discussion of some topic. The

⁹ See section 2.2.6

teachers preferred group work to other methods. For example, Chiutsi explained that she mostly uses group work because, “*group work allows learners to interact more and discuss questions amongst themselves compared to other methods*”. While learners were still in their groups, the teachers tended to ask questions which usually called for chorus or short answers from the learners. Teachers tended not to review their current lessons at the end. Most lessons tended to end abruptly without summaries and without guidance for preparing for the next lesson. There was little evidence of evaluation of how much learners had actually understood. There were few opportunities in which learners could ask questions in the lessons.

The use of one method, as practised by the teachers in this study, limits the learners’ opportunities to engage in other hands-on activities that promote the learning of skills and values. The teachers’ methodologies in this study can undermine the successful implementation of Life skills.

4.2.4 Teacher health status

The teaching of Life skills Education can be affected by the teacher’s health status. For example, the principal of Bango school explained that “*some teachers are infected by HIV/AIDS themselves or they have family members or colleagues suffering from the disease. It becomes very difficult for such teachers to teach about HIV/AIDS*”.

There seems to be a discrepancy however between what the principal said and what teachers indicated during interview. For example, Chintengo, the teacher at Bango, explained: “*I would still teach HIV/AIDS if I was infected or affected because it is my job as a teacher to do so. I would not teach only if I fell very ill and cannot manage to come to school.*” The discrepancy may arise because HIV/AIDS is an issue of confidentiality and may be teachers have not openly expressed reservations about having to teach HIV/AIDS on the basis of their being infected or affected. Teachers’ health status, being infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, may

make them uncomfortable and reluctant to teach about things that actually affect them. This can undermine the implementation of Life skills Education.

Investigations also reveal that HIV/AIDS also increases other teachers' workloads, resulting in some subjects, including Life skills Education, not being taught. This was explained by Chimtengo's principal: *"teachers who are infected tend to be absent from school for lengthy periods of time. Their colleagues find themselves having to carry the burden of teaching extra classes. The teachers who take care of their ill colleague's classes usually just take care of few subjects such as Maths and English in their colleague's class. Sometimes it is difficult to find replacements for teachers who are unable to discharge their duties because of ill-health."* Thus the prevalence of HIV/AIDS undermines the teaching of Life skills Education.

4.2.5 Teacher Development (training) in the teaching of Life skills Education

Only two teachers in the sample underwent a two-day program for training in the teaching of Life skills. One of these two teachers, M'thiko, experienced a personality clash with the trainer and as a result, admits *"I was not attentive. I did not like the training because the trainer kept swearing throughout"*. Lack of training of the three untrained teachers affected the way they approach the teaching of the subject. For example, Chiutsi pointed out that, *"I teach the subject in the same way I teach other subjects as I was not trained in the teaching of the subject."* I have shown that one of Chimtengo's lessons was aimed at teaching language skills than Life skills¹⁰.

In contrast to the untrained teachers, the trained teacher, Wakwathu followed two of the key practices advocated in the Life skills curriculum material. Wakwathu explicitly addressed two goals of the Life skills program: equip learners with appropriate information about the social challenges facing them, and help them develop the necessary skills for them to deal with these

¹⁰ See section 4.2 (b)

challenges. Wakwathu's lesson covered HIV/AIDS as a social challenge facing her learners and assertiveness as a skill.

Chiutsi's remarks and Chimtengo's practice in the teaching of Life skills show that untrained teachers in the study did not always employ appropriate approaches for the teaching Life skills Education. They therefore adopt the methods they use in teaching other subjects as a coping strategy in teaching Life skills. Teaching Life skills in the same manner as any other subject may result in Life skills lessons ending up as a medium for teaching and learning other academic skills more than social skills, as evidenced from Chimtengo's lesson. This results in the lessons deflecting from the goals of Life skills Education. This can undermine the implementation of the program.

4.3 Summary of ways teachers influence the implementation of Life skills

The evidence on the influence of teacher-related factors in the implementation of Life skills Education suggests four factors that may to an extent undermine the implementation of Life skills Education. Firstly, two of the teachers' dissatisfaction with teaching as their career choice affects their teaching of subjects including Life skills. Secondly, teachers are working in difficult conditions with little pay resulting in teachers giving most attention to what they perceive as priority subjects such as Maths and Languages. Thirdly, one of the teachers' health status, being infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, makes him uncomfortable to teach about an issue which affects him. Infected teachers get very sick from the disease and absent themselves from work, thereby creating heavy workloads for other teachers who care for their classes. The over-worked teachers teach a few subjects to the extra classes such as Maths and English and leave out subjects like Life skills. Fourthly, lack of training for some teachers means they teach Life skills Education the way they would teach other subjects. This results in Life skills lessons ending up as a medium for teaching and learning other academic skills such as reading and comprehension rather than an emphasis on the social and personal development of learners.

4.4 The influence of learner factors

4.4.1 Prevalence of HIV/AIDS

Teachers identify the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the community as a hindrance to the teaching of Life skills. Chimtengo feels that presence of learners in class who are affected and infected by HIV/AIDS makes the teaching of HIV/AIDS sensitive. Chimtengo explained: *“there is prevalence of HIV/AIDS in this area. I have some learners in my class who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and they look infected themselves. Other learners have sick parents and relatives suffering from the disease. It is sensitive to teach about HIV/AIDS as the affected children become uncomfortable. I therefore do not go into details on an HIV/AIDS topic.”*

One teacher in the sample thus omits teaching some issues in the program such as HIV/AIDS as he feels that it is not appropriate to teach things that may affect learners and their families directly. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS affects learners and poses a challenge to one of the teachers who chooses not to teach issues of HIV/AIDS. This results in the teacher not addressing the most crucial issues in the Life skills curriculum.

4.4.2 Poverty

The poverty of learners in the rural schools affects the learning of Life skills and other curriculum subjects. Chiutsi explained: *“most of the boys have one pair of shorts and girls one dress which is torn. They do not feel free in class. They look miserable and they do not concentrate. They absent themselves from school towards the end of the week when their clothes get dirty.”* Lack of concentration affects their learning making them unable to follow what they are being taught so they learn very little or even nothing at all. Learners’ absences from school will also affect their learning; they may not make sense of lessons as they are not able to link each new lesson to the preceding ones. This may undermine the successful teaching of subjects in the curriculum including Life skills Education.

4.4.3 Language

Some teachers consider that the language of instruction affects learning. Chimtengo explained: *“if you are not a native¹¹ Yao, you end up teaching children what you did not mean to teach them. For example, there are some words which are pronounced and written the same way both in Chichewa and Yao but they mean different things. You may be using these words in wrong contexts in the learners’ home language. You may not know this... the word ‘mbiya’ is written and pronounced in the same way both in Chichewa and Chiyao. But in Chichewa the word means ‘pot’ and in Chiyao it means ‘money’.”* Teaching in a language that is different from learners’ home language may result in learners having problems in learning of subjects including Life skills Education. The problem is further compounded when the learners are taught by a teacher whose home language is not that of the learners.

4.4.4 Mixed classes

Other teachers see mixed classes (boys and girls) in Life skills together as a challenge to the teaching and learning of the program. For example, Nasibeko explained: *“Some girls and boys feel shy to express themselves openly on issues of sexual relationships. I would prefer to have boys taught on their own and girls on their own as well so that they become free to contribute to class discussions.”* Teachers feel that teaching sexual development to boys and girls together affects the quality of class discussions and consequently the quality of learning of Life skills Education. Teaching boys and girls separately is viewed by some teachers as a way of promoting learning in Life skills lessons. This would require the Ministry of Education’s permission for teachers to implement their idea of teaching boys and girls separately in Life skills.

¹¹ Yao is the home language of the children in the Zomba district and Chichewa is the language of instruction in the lower primary school.

4.5 Summary of ways learners influence implementation of Life skills Education

In terms of the influence of learner factors in the implementation of Life skills therefore, four points have emerged as major issues undermining the implementation of Life skills program. One, the health status of some learners (HIV/AIDS infected and affected) makes some teachers choose not to teach that which affects their learners. Two, the young age of the learners make some teachers feel that some content (sexual matters) is not suited to the age of the children; teachers omit content on sexual relationships, and teachers leave out the most critical issues which Life skills Education is supposed to address. Three, poverty of learners affect their learning – learners in worn out clothes do not feel free in class. They are miserable and do not concentrate and often absent themselves from school. This may result in learners learning very little from the Life skills program. Four, most learners are shy to discuss sexual matters in mixed classes of boys and girls. This affects the quality of class discussions and affects the quality of learning of Life skills Education.

4.6 Influence of School Principals' support in the implementation of Life skills Education

School principals in the sample claimed that they provide support to the teaching of Life skills by ensuring that teachers treat Life skills as a valuable subject as they treat other subjects, ensuring availability of needed resources and assisting teachers in the areas in which they find problems in the teaching of Life skills. Chimtengo's principal remarked: *"Life skills is time-tabled at this school and I encourage my teachers to treat all subjects as important. I have seen that teachers are putting much effort in teaching examinable subjects... they are teaching Life skills because they fear being found not teaching the subject by the Primary Education Advisors. I however tell them that although Life skills are not examinable, but some topics from Life skills such as HIV/AIDS are examined in Health Education so they have to treat this subject as important as they do with other subjects"*. Chimtengo confirmed that his principal

encourages him to treat the subject as important, *“the principal advises us not to concentrate on teaching the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) only but also to take Life skills seriously.”*

Some of the teachers however seem not to take their principal’s advice seriously. For example, Chiutsi remarked: *“this subject just adds to workload. It is not examined. It is better for one to concentrate on teaching the examinable subjects.”* While school principals’ encouragement may facilitate its successful implementation, the way teachers treat the subject can negatively affect the teaching of the subject. Some teachers of Life skills are giving most attention to examinable subjects at the expense of attention to the teaching of Life skills Education.

Most teachers in the sample confirmed that their principals do their best to ensure that resources such as chart papers and text-books are available at their schools for teaching Life skills. For example, Chimtengo remarked that, *“the principal requests for some text-books from the curriculum development centre, the Malawi Institute of Education,”* Wakwathu pointed out that, *“the principal buys some chart paper”* and Nasibeko indicated that *“the principal goes to the neighbouring schools to borrow some text-books for us.”*

Data in the study support the principals’ claims that they treat Life skills as important and make available to their teachers resources for teaching Life skills. But data does not support the claims of three of the principals that they provide professional support to the teachers in the areas in which they find problems in the teaching of the subject. Chiutsi explained: *“I do not get any help from the principal. He is supposed to help us in the subject as he was trained (in the teaching of the subject) for that.”* Chiutsi’s remarks suggest that she encounters some problems and her principal’s professional support would make a difference in her teaching of the subject. The remarks also reveal that the school principals are expected by teachers to provide this support, since they were trained for this purpose.

Wakwathu’s principal showed evidence of professional support he provides to the teachers of Life skills Education. On his office pin board was a school based in-service teacher development program for teachers of all subjects for the year 2008. In confirming her

principal's claim Wakwathu explained: *“the Principal is helping me in those areas in which I am finding problems in the subject. He sometimes helps me to isolate relevant social difficulties facing learners which certain topics in the curriculum materials are intended to convey. These social difficulties are sometimes not explicit. He also works out with me how best to approach some of my lessons.”*

Wakwathu's remarks also suggest that the program's training on its own is not enough for a Life-skills-trained teacher to teach the subject successfully. There is also need of school-based support to complement the knowledge from the training. School-based principal support therefore is important for effective teaching of Life skills Education.

4.7 Summary of ways school principals' support influences implementation of Life skills Education

Most of the principals' support for the teaching of Life skills is by ensuring availability of resources and encouraging teachers to treat Life skills seriously as they treat other subjects. Availability of resources may make some contribution to effective teaching and learning. Encouragement of teachers to take the teaching of the subject seriously may also make some contribution in driving teachers to put their best effort in the teaching of the subject. However, lack of support in the area of helping teachers with difficulties in the teaching of the subject limits some teachers' effectiveness.

4.8 The influence of Supervision on the implementation of Life skills Education

Urban schools seem to receive more frequent supervision and useful support for the teaching of Life skills from the Primary Education Advisors than rural schools. Wakwathu's principal explained: *“the Advisor monitors the teaching of the teachers in all subjects and identifies the problems which the teachers are facing. He then invites the teachers to the Teacher Development Centre and helps them in the areas they are finding problems in teaching the subject.”*

However, this frequent supervision and support is not experienced by the rural schools. Chiutsi's principal remarked: *"Since January (2008) the Primary Education Advisor has only come to this school twice. Although they come to see if teachers are in class teaching, they do not advise teachers how to teach the subject (Life skills)."* The role of the district supervisors is perceived as coercing the teachers to be in class teaching. However, they offer limited support in teacher development and curriculum implementation.

From this sample study, there appears to be greater district support for urban schools compared with rural schools. Urban schools received frequent courses in the teaching of Life skills Education, whereas rural schools did not have these courses.

4.9 Summary of ways supervisors influence implementation of Life skills Education

Investigations have revealed that while supervision by Primary Education Advisors brings useful support in terms of in-service courses for the teaching of Life skills in the urban schools, supervision in the rural schools on the other hand is sporadic and not supporting the teaching of Life skills Education.

4.10 Influence of resources on the teaching of Life skills Education

For Life skills Education, the two major resources are text-books for learners and Teachers' Guide for teachers. All the principals and the teachers in the study indicated that they had enough Teachers' Guides but did not have enough text-books.

In observed lessons where teachers used text-books, more than six learners shared one text-book. The shortage of text-books resulted in many learners sitting quietly and just listening to their friends without making much contribution to what was going on in the lessons.

Two teachers in the sample consider the Teachers' Guide to be overloaded. They feel that there is too much content to be covered compared to the amount of time. Chimtengo remarked: *"There are too many activities in a lesson. A lesson is only 30 minutes. In this lesson, there are*

five activities. I was moving quickly to finish the activities.” This suggests that teachers follow the curriculum documents verbatim, not using their professional discretion to select appropriate material for the limited time available to them. This means that the teachers are implementing the Life skills curriculum quite mechanically. This can undermine the implementation of the program.

4.11 Summary of ways resources influence the implementation of Life skills Education

Investigations have revealed that the difficult language¹² and overload in the Teachers’ Guide negatively affect the teaching of Life skills Education. Teachers omit any sections in the Guide that they do not understand. Some crucial issues learners are supposed to learn are not taught. The overload of the Teachers’ Guide makes the teachers to go through teaching/learning activities quickly attempting to cover the content of the Guide by the end of a school year. This compromises the quality of teaching and learning of Life skills Education.

4.12 The influence of School Context

Initial investigations in the study reveal an enabling context for implementation of Life skills in the urban schools in this study. In both the two urban schools, the lower classes are allocated two teachers. This is to ease class management due to large class sizes in the urban schools. In the observed lessons, Wakwathu taught while Leka-leka assisted with keeping learners quiet and listening. This may facilitate learning as learning experiences are maximized in a well-managed class.

While the allocation of two teachers per class eases the problems associated with large classes in the urban schools, teachers in the rural schools claim large classes undermine their effectiveness in the teaching of Life skills Education. Chintengo indicated: *“I had too many groups because of large number of learners. This made me to reduce the time for consolidating*

¹² See section 4.2.2

the feedback from the groups. I wanted all the groups to present before time was up (to mark the end of the lesson).” Large classes make teachers reduce the amount of time they spend on tasks. Spending less time on tasks affects the learning from a lesson and this undermines the implementation of Life skills.

Teachers in the urban schools also utilized their pairing as class teachers to do team teaching. They shared topics basing on their strengths in the content knowledge of the topics. For example, I was unable to observe M’thiko teach as *“(she) taught (her) topics the last two weeks. (She) will only teach after another two weeks”*. The practice of teachers teaching content they know has a high probability of producing better lessons. This can contribute to the successful implementation of Life skills Education.

The two urban schools I observed had more enabling learning cultures for successful teaching of Life skills. The learners in urban schools were more active in their participation in the lessons. They articulated their thinking better, both in their responses to the questions posed to them by their teachers and the questions which they asked their teachers. Children in urban areas are generally better socialized to schooling and more used to participation than their fellow learners in the rural schools.

A school feeding scheme, available in the urban schools, is also an enabling factor for learning in these schools compared to rural schools. The scheme provides learners with porridge. The observed Life skills lessons were taught just after the learners had their porridge. The school feeding scheme both improves the attendance of learners but also their concentration in the lessons. As explained by Wakwathu: *“the food which the learners are given makes them not absent themselves from school. In class, the learners are attentive and active because they are not hungry.”* Attentive learners are able to follow what they are taught in the lesson. Learners being at school promotes learning because they follow the progression of lessons and can easily make sense of each lesson by linking each new lesson to the preceding ones. This may make the teaching of Life skills Education more successful.

While children in the urban schools in this study learn on full stomachs, poor rural children come to school hungry, having had no breakfast and bringing no lunch. This affects their learning as explained by Chiutsi: *“most of these children come to school hungry. Because of hunger, they do not concentrate on what is happening in class. They do not listen to you. Sometimes they just stare at you for a while when you tell them to do a certain learning activity.”* Lack of ability to concentrate due to lack of food affects children’s learning in rural schools and this undermines the implementation of Life skills in these rural schools.

My investigations also revealed that urban communities offer a supportive context for the implementation of Life skills Education in the studied urban schools. Wakwathu’s principal remarked: *“parents encourage the teaching of Life skills here. They tell us in the meetings (Parent and Teacher Association meetings) that they learn a lot from their children what the children learn in Life skills especially about HIV/AIDS. Life skills does not only help the children. It also benefits the parents.”* This suggests that urban communities check what their children learn in the program. Although it is not conclusive, these remarks also suggest that there are urban parents who support their children academically at home in the subject.

While urban communities seem to encourage the teaching of Life skills, rural communities seem to negatively affect the teaching of Life skills in the rural schools. Some parents and community members of Chiutsi’s rural school objected to illustrations of sexual reproductive organs. Chiutsi’s principal cited his own mother as one of those parents objecting to illustrations. He explained how his mother confronted him about the illustrations: *“when my mother saw some illustrations in my children’s books, she confronted me as to why I could give pupils books with such obscene pictures in them. She said that she brought me up properly herself and did not allow me to be exposed to such obscene things. She told me not to allow my children to be reading such books”.* This also suggests that the parents may even discourage their children or wards to read these books. This can negatively affect children’s learning of the

subject. The story also suggests that parents question the morality of those who teach the subject and of other parents who allow children to read the books with such illustrations.

The members of the community at school also view Life skills Education as estranging children from their cultural roots. Chimtengo explained: *“the chief came to enquire what we teach the children as most of them are refusing to enrol at initiation schools. The children tell their parents that they are taught not to go to initiation schools as initiation practices put their lives at risk”*. Such complaints by the members of the community about Life skills Education may result in the parents not encouraging the teaching of the subject in their school and not supporting their children academically in the subject in their homes. This can undermine the implementation of Life skills Education.

Parents and members of the community of Chimtengo’s school seem to negatively affect the teaching of Life skills through their practice of initiation ceremonies. This is shown by the remarks of the principal: *“the practices at initiation ceremonies contradict what we teach learners. You see, girls are encouraged to have sexual intercourse with men older than them as a test of their physical maturity. This is what we discourage them to do in Life skills”*.

The effect of Life skills Education may thus only extend to times when learners are on school grounds or in their classrooms. When they are out of school, the learners are influenced by their parents, through initiation ceremonies, to engage in behaviours which largely eliminate the positive influence of Life skills Education.

4.13 Summary of ways school context influence the implementation of Life skills Education

In terms of the influence of school context, the following issues have emerged as undermining the implementation of the Life skills program. One, hunger and poverty among the rural learners affect their concentration in class and these negatively impact on the learning of the children. Two, in certain communities in the study, content related to issues around sexuality are inappropriate, particularly illustrations in text-books.

4.14 Summary of how Life skills Education is being implemented in different contexts

The implementation of Life skills program in the schools used in this study was not equally successful. In particular, there seems to be vast differences in the implementation between urban and rural contexts. In the section below, I will briefly look at the key factors that enhance or inhibit the implementation of the program at each school involved in this study.

a. Chimtengo's school - rural

- Life skills is time-tabled at the school just like in all the other schools in the sample. However, most of the times, the teacher does not teach the subject because he seems to be frustrated with working in difficult conditions for little pay. This makes him to give most attention to what he perceives as priority subjects such as Maths and Languages, at the expense of attention to the teaching of Life skills.
- The teacher avoids handling issues of HIV/AIDS and engaging learners on the subject because he feels it is a sensitive issue affecting his learners and the community of the school.
- Lessons were not aligned to the goals of Life skills Education. Lessons taught more of language skills than aimed at teaching Life skills Education.
- Initiation ceremonies in the community of the school seem to give contradictory messages to what the learners learn in Life skills Education. This seems to dilute what the learners learn in Life skills Education and leaves learners in a dilemma as to which message should guide their social lives.
- Parents of learners seem to be opposed to the illustrations in the learners' books, discourage their children or wards to be reading these books.
- The language of instruction is different from the learners' mother tongue; this seems to confuse the learners who mostly use their mother tongue outside the classroom.

- Large class sizes seem to make the teacher unable to give attention and help to each individual learner. Large classes is particularly of concern in the teaching of Life skills Education compared to other curriculum subjects because Life skills Education deals with development of social skills and changing of attitudes and values in learners. Development of skills and changing of attitudes requires a teacher to give each learner individual attention to help the learner develop these skills.

b. Chiutsi's school - rural

- The teacher chooses to concentrate on teaching examinable subjects at the expense of teaching Life skills Education.
- The teacher's beliefs makes her to skip the content dealing with sexual matters as she feels that the material is not suited to the age of her learners. This results in the teacher not addressing the very issues that Life skills program has identified as most crucial.
- Poverty and hunger affect learning of impoverished learners from the school. Learners come to school poorly dressed and hungry. Poor dressing make the learners to feel ashamed and they do not feel free in class amongst peers. They are unable to concentrate on what the teacher is teaching them. Sometimes the learners absent themselves from school because of lack of clothing. Also hunger prevents learners from concentrating on what is happening in class, thus affecting their learning.
- District supervisors who come to the school are more interested on appearance of good teaching (teachers' attendance, state of files, teachers' adherence to the timetable) rather than being interested in observing the quality of learning of Life skills Education and offering necessary support in the implementation of the program.

c M'thiko and Nasibeko's school - urban

- *M'thiko* has little interest in teaching as a career, resulting in a lack of commitment to her job. In the observed lessons, M'thiko was observed wandering outside the classroom

halfway through the lesson in which she was assisting her colleague with keeping learners quiet and listening. She also considered Life skills training which she received as ineffective because she had a personality clash with her trainer. She indicated that she was not attentive in the training. She therefore seems not to have embraced the opportunity of the training to empower herself in the teaching of the subject.

- *Nasibeko* had a language challenge with some sections of the Life skills curriculum material especially the Teachers' Guide. As a coping mechanism, she skips teaching any content she does not comprehend. This results in her not addressing crucial issues in Life skills Education.
- Mixed classes of boys and girls learning issues of sexual development in Life skills together seems to pose a challenge to the teaching and learning of the program at the school. *Nasibeko* explained that some girls and boys feel shy to express themselves openly on issues of sexual relationships. This seems to affect the quality of class discussions and learning of Life skills Education at the school.

d. Wakwathu and Leka-leka's school - urban

There are indicators of success of the implementation of the Life skills program at this school compared to the other three schools in this study.

- *Wakwathu* seem to be generally motivated and dedicated to teaching as her career amidst challenges such as low salaries. She did not express resentment to teaching despite the fact that she took up teaching as a last resort after being unsuccessful at securing another type of employment.
- *Wakwathu's* lessons were aligned to the goals of Life skills Education.
- A school feeding scheme improves school attendance and concentration of learners.

- The learners at the school are better socialized to schooling and actively participate in the lessons.
- The school principal provides school-based professional support to teachers in areas in which they face problems in the teaching of Life skills Education.
- District supervisors give frequent courses in the teaching of Life skills Education to the teachers at the school.

4.15 Closing remarks

The implementation of Life skills curriculum is hampered by a number of factors. The most important are listed below.

- The difficult working conditions demotivate teachers and make them to give most attention to what they perceive as priority subjects such as Maths and Languages, at the expense of attention to the teaching of Life skills Education.
- Lack of in-service training to untrained teachers results in teaching Life skills Education the way they would with other subjects. This results in Life skills lessons ending up as a medium for teaching and learning other academic skills such as reading and comprehension skills than social skills.
- Prevalence of HIV/AIDS affects both the teachers of Life skills Education and their learners. It makes teachers uncomfortable and reluctant to teach that which affects them and their learners.
- Unsuitability of some content (sexual matters) to the age of the children results in some teachers choosing not to address the most crucial issues of Life skills Education.
- Hunger and poverty among rural learners affect their concentration in class and sometimes make them to absent themselves from school.

- The difficult language of the Teachers' Guide puts off some teachers who cope by skipping teaching some content.
- Cultural beliefs (initiation schools) affect the implementation of Life skills Education. Teachers and their principals believe that the cultural beliefs of rural communities dilute what learners are taught by the teachings of initiation ceremonies – encouraging learners to engage in sexual relationships, the very issues which Life skills Education confronts. The rural communities believe Life skills Education estrange children from their cultural roots by discouraging the children to attend initiation schools.

It is important that the above factors that hamper the successful implementation of the Life skills curriculum be minimized in order to ensure an effective implementation of the curriculum.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills program in the primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi. The results of the study have been reported in the previous chapter. These will now be interpreted or given meaning using a comparison of these findings against a review of related literature. The discussion will be guided by the focus questions of the study. The main research question will be addressed in chapter 6.

5.2 Focus question 1

To what extent do teachers in Zomba district understand the aims and objectives of Life skills as they implement the subject in the classroom?

One important condition for a curriculum to be implemented effectively identified by Pratt (1980) is teachers' understanding of the goals and content of the curriculum. Pratt argues that teachers who are supposedly implementing a curriculum sometimes cannot even identify its main features. Such teachers are likely to encounter great difficulties when they are required to change their educational approaches. The findings of this study support Pratt's argument that a teacher needs understanding of the goals and content of a curriculum to implement the curriculum effectively.

The findings of this study show that simply knowing and being able to recite the goals of a curriculum is different to understanding them and being able to apply them in the lessons. All the teachers in the sample of this study were able to recite the goals of Life skills Education, but not all actually understood them and applied them in their teaching of Life skills Education.

Chimtengo's lessons were more aligned with goals of language lessons.¹³ Teaching is not merely about giving learners activities to fill their time and keep them busy. To enable worthwhile learning, activities must align with the goals of the subject and extend learner development within the subject area. Without a secure link of Life skills lessons to goals of the program, curriculum implementation makes little contribution to behavioural change on the part of the learners. In part, the inability of teachers to deeply understand the goals of the Life skills program can be attributed to superficial nature of training¹⁴ and support from the Primary Education Advisors. Wakwathu was trained and supported by the Primary Education Advisors and aligned her lessons with the goals of the Life skills program.¹⁵ Both theoretical understanding of the goals and content of a curriculum and a teacher's ability to align his/her lessons to these goals are crucial for a successful implementation of a curriculum. This study has therefore established that a teachers' inability to align her lessons with the goals of Life skills Education may be due to a lack of training and is a barrier to successful implementation of the program.

5.3 Focus question 2

How effective is the training for Life skills Education that these teachers have received?

Fullan (1990) identifies in-service professional development about the practices demanded by a curriculum as an important condition for successful implementation of a curriculum.

The findings of this study support Fullan's position. The study has found that training of teachers in the teaching of curriculum subjects makes some contribution towards a successful implementation of a curriculum. This study has found that only Wakwathu, who was trained in the teaching of Life skills Education, aligned her lessons with the goals of Life skills Education. The cascade model used in the training of teachers of Life skills Education is not

¹³ See section 4.2.2

¹⁴ See section 2.2.4

¹⁵ See section 4.2.2

working effectively. Wakwathu, the trained teacher whose lessons aligned to the goals of Life skills, continued to depend on her principal for professional support in the teaching of the Life skills program.¹⁶ The cascade model of training was too short to prepare the teachers adequately to teach the subject. The cascade model of training has the problem that required information may not be transmitted properly and it consequently fails to equip teachers to teach a subject effectively (Rembe, 2006). The cascade model left the responsibility of training Life skills Education teachers to school principals. This may be an unfair burden on people who are highly pressured, managing their schools, resources and learners. The principals are not subject specialists in Life skills Education and they may not fill their expected roles as a training resource in their schools. The cascade model also contributed to the unsuccessful implementation of a Life skills program in Zimbabwe (Rembe, 2006). The training for Life skills Education that some teachers received may not be effective mainly because of the cascade model and its short duration.

5.4 Focus question 3

What structural and social contextual factors hinder successful implementation of Life skills Education?

Cornbleth (1990) identified factors within the structural and social contexts of the school environment which influence the implementation of a curriculum. Whitaker (1993) elaborating on Cornbleth notion of structural and social contexts developed the notion of role players in curriculum implementation. Using Whitaker's notions of role players in curriculum implementation and Cornbleth's notions of the structural and social contexts in which a curriculum is implemented, this section discusses the factors that hinder successful implementation of the Life skills curriculum in primary schools in the Zomba district, Malawi.

¹⁶ See section 4.6

5.4.1 Factors that affect a classroom environment conducive to successful implementation of Life skills Education

As indicated on page 30, characteristics and conditions of teachers and learners are key factors within the classroom environment which influence the implementation of a curriculum. The study has found the following factors as influencing the implementation of Life skills Education.

5.4.1.1 Teachers' attitude to teaching

A teacher's attitude to teaching affects the successful implementation of a curriculum (Jansen, 2002). Jansen asserts that bringing a curriculum into practice successfully hinges on the teacher and his/her dispositions towards work. The feeling that a teacher has about his/her work shapes his/her ability in implementing a curriculum policy.

The findings of this study agree with Jansen. This study found that some teachers' discontentment with a teaching career can affect the teaching of subjects in the curriculum, including Life skills Education¹⁷. The implementation is further undermined when they teach the subject because they teach Standard 4, not because they are interested in the subject.

5.4.1.2 Poor working conditions for teachers

Difficult conditions under which teachers work in Malawi undermines the teaching of curriculum subjects (Lowe, 2008; Kadzamira, 2006). Lowe reports that teachers miss teaching some lessons in order to take other casual work to supplement their salaries. Kadzamira's (2006) study established that poor working conditions for teachers affects their orientation to teaching as a career. Kadzamira asserts that teachers' poor working conditions coupled with low salaries led to widespread teacher discontent. Teaching is now widely regarded as 'employment of the last resort' in the country.

¹⁷ See section 4.2 (a)

The findings of this study agree with Lowe (2008) and Kadzamira's (2006) assertion. The study found that difficult working conditions such as heavy work load with little salary makes some teachers affect their commitment to the teaching of curriculum subjects in the schools including Life skills Education.

5.4.1. 3 Teachers' beliefs

A curriculum's alignment to teachers' beliefs is an important condition for successful implementation of a curriculum (Ratsatsi, 2005). Ratsatsi argues that if a teacher feels that a curriculum's content contradicts his/her beliefs, it is quickly dropped or radically altered.

The findings of this study agree with Ratsatsi. This study found that some teachers do not teach some content on sexual matters because they feel that the content is unsuited to the age of the learners. The teachers feel that small children become confused when they are taught about issues of sexual relationships, as they do not understand sexual matters at that age. Older learners feel shy to express themselves openly on sexual matters in the presence of the opposite sex. This affects the quality of class discussions and undermines the implementation of the program.

5.4.1. 4 Teaching strategies

Educators' adoption of new practices, changes to their traditional roles (giving up practices in which they feel secure) are important conditions for successful implementation of a curriculum (Mahlangu, 2001).

The findings of this study agree with Mahlangu. This study found that teachers taught children using familiar methods, in contrast to the participatory methods which Life skills curriculum documents advocate – such as case studies, posters, story telling, songs, debate, posters, role play, games, poetry recitals, future's wheels, drama and values clarification. The teachers taught using instruction with little 'discovery' learning. Much of the class time was taken up with teacher talk intermingled with question and answer with some rudimentary group work.

Questions were generally low-level and often closed which require learners to answer in one word, sometimes in chorus. The common practice of the teachers was to start their lessons with a recap of the previous lesson, but none reviewed the current lesson at the end. Most lessons ended abruptly without summaries, and without guidance for preparing for the next lesson. There was little evaluation to judge how much learners had actually absorbed. There was little encouragement for learners to argue or challenge what transpired in the lessons.

According to Life skills curriculum documents participatory hands-on activity in class is crucial for promoting learners' knowledge of social challenges and ways of dealing with them. But teachers' methods placed learners in a passive role. The dominantly teacher-centred exposition strategy used by almost all the teachers in the study may be attributed to the teacher-training program used in Malawi. Most of the teachers observed had taught for more than 10 years. They were trained in the Malawi Special Distance Teacher Education Program (MASTEP) or the Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Program (MIITEP). The teacher training lecturers in these programs mainly used teacher-centred methodologies (Kunje & Chimombo, 1999).

The teachers' transmission methods may be undermining the implementation of the Life skills program.

5.4.1.5 Personal circumstances of teachers

A teacher's personal social circumstances, such as personal or family health restricts that teacher's ability to implement a curriculum effectively (Lowe, 2008). Lowe argues that teachers in Malawi are generally dedicated and hard-working people who do their best under extremely difficult circumstances, but many are constrained by social circumstances such as caring for sick children, personal ill-health, including HIV/AIDS.

The findings of this study agree with Lowe. The study found that some teachers who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS become uncomfortable and reluctant to teach about an

issue which affects them personally. Infected teachers may get very sick from the disease, and absent themselves from work. Other teachers have to take care of their classes, so they concentrate on teaching a few (examinable) subjects such as Maths and English leaving out subjects like Life skills Education.

5.4.1. 6 Mixed classes

Learners' willingness and cooperation to participate in the curriculum is an important condition for the successful implementation of a curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Ornstein and Hunkins argue that it is only when learners react to the experiences they encounter in the curriculum with cooperation that a successful implementation of a curriculum can be ensured at classroom level.

The findings of this study agree with Ornstein and Hunkins' argument on the importance of learners' active participation in their learning as a condition for successful implementation of a curriculum. This study found that learners' little participation in discussions in class on matters of sexual development affect the successful implementation of the subject. To solve the problem of some learners not actively participating in the lessons, some teachers think that boys and girls need to be taught separately to promote learning of sexual matters in Life skills Education. This would increase the staffing resources needed.

5.4.1. 7 Language of instruction

A language of instruction different from learners' home language affects the implementation of a curriculum (Lowe, 2008; Fleisch, 2008). Lowe and Fleisch report that learners whose home language is not the same as the language of instruction have been found to have more learning problems. This is compounded when the learners are taught by a teacher whose home language is not that of the learners. A teacher whose home language is not that of the learners may not be able to make difficult concepts clear (Lowe, 2008, Fleisch, 2008).

The findings of this study agree with Lowe's and Fleisch's findings. This study found that the use of Chichewa as a language of instruction rather than learners' home language (Chiyao) confuses learners in the rural schools who mostly use their mother tongue, Chiyao, at home and in the school environs. Learners become confused when teachers whose home language is not Chiyao unknowingly wrongly use words which are pronounced the same in both Chiyao and Chichewa but mean different things.¹⁸ Due to their lack of knowledge of the learners' home language, teachers can communicate wrong messages to the learners. This sometimes results in learners misunderstanding what they are taught.

Language of instruction may continue to hamper a successful implementation of curriculum subjects in Malawi because it is not clear to teachers what is the official policy on the language of instruction in Standards 1-4 in the primary schools. Some believe that Banda's¹⁹ directive from 1968, requiring Chichewa to be used as the language of instruction in Standard 1-4 still stands. Others appear to believe that the circular from 1996, requiring the children's home language, is the official policy (Lowe, 2008). Despite a general agreement that the 1996 directive instructed teachers to teach in the home language of the majority of their pupils in Standards 1-4, almost all teachers appear to teach in Chichewa, even in the predominantly Chiyao areas in Zomba. This is sometimes because teachers do not know the language of their pupils, but in some cases it is because they believe that all pupils in the mixed class understand Chichewa, so using the national language (Chichewa) makes the lessons comprehensive to all (Lowe, 2008). For native speakers of Chichewa, this seems a reasonable proposition. The child would learn in her home language. For the vast numbers of non-Chichewa speakers in Malawi however, this policy creates problems. Many teachers appointed to non-Chichewa speaking schools cannot speak the local language, and have to do all their teaching in Chichewa. The child therefore does not learn in their mother tongue and this puts those children at a

¹⁸ See section 4.3.3

¹⁹ Banda was the president of Malawi from 1960- 1993

disadvantage. The problem of language policy may also continue to hamper a successful implementation of curriculum subjects in Malawi because the Teachers' Guides are in English while teaching is in Chichewa. The teachers in the lower primary school whose command of English is generally low find it difficult to translate the information in the Teachers' Guide to Chichewa, the language of instruction. This affects the quality of lessons.

5.4.1. 8 Examination and selection policies

Whitaker (1993) identified non-examinable status of a subject as one of the factors which undermines its implementation. Whitaker asserts that, due to the great value given to public examination certificates by communities and schools, teachers have tended to concentrate on subjects that are examinable and are thought to promote academic excellence.

The findings of this study agree with Whitaker's assertion. The study found that teachers give more attention to examinable subjects such as Maths and Languages other than Life skills Education which is not examinable. The non-examinable status of Life skills Education also contributed to unsuccessful implementation of the Life Orientation in South Africa. Rooth (2005) found that Life Orientation is not being taken seriously by teachers in South Africa because it is not an examinable subject. In some cases, it is not being taught at all despite the fact that it is included on the timetable. In other schools, it is not even included on the timetable.

5.4.1. 9 Lack of resources

Lack of learning resources, especially text-books, affects the successful implementation of a curriculum in Malawi (Lowe, 2008; Kadzamira, 2006). Lowe found that there was high pupil to text-book ratio in the schools involved in his study. Kadzamira noted that the primary school system in Malawi lacks teaching and learning materials especially the rural primary schools.

The findings of this study agree with Lowe and Kadzamira's findings. The study found that there was high pupil to text-book ratio in the schools involved in this study. The average pupil

to text-book ratio was 6:1. One consequence of these shortages of text-books was that many learners entire learning experience seemed to be sitting mostly quietly and listening. This may be a barrier to effective teaching and learning of Life skills Education, a subject that requires learners to participate in learning activities to enhance the development of knowledge of social challenges and ways of dealing with them.

5.4. 2 School organisation

5.4.2.1 Curriculum implementation not well managed

Mahlangu (2001) identified management of curriculum implementation (by innovators of the curriculum) as an important condition for a curriculum to be effectively implemented. A successful implementation of a curriculum requires that innovators are concerned with the more difficult task of maintenance of the curriculum, rather than just introducing it in the schools.

The findings of this study concur with Mahlangu's assertion. The study found that lack of support from district education officials to rural schools seems to undermine the implementation Life skills Education particularly in rural schools. While urban schools seem to receive more frequent supervision and courses from the Primary Education Advisors in support of the teaching of Life skills Education, rural schools do not receive this frequent supervision and support. District officials seem to concentrate on managing the implementation of Life skills Education in urban schools at the expense of rural schools. Lack of proper management of the implementation of the Life skills curriculum in the rural schools therefore undermines the successful implementation of the program in those schools.

5.4. 2.2 Lack of school-based professional support to Life skills Education teachers

Ornstein and Hunkins (1993) and Prinsloo (2007) identified support from school principals as one of the most important conditions for successful implementation of curriculum subjects. To contribute to the successful implementation of a curriculum, school principals, regarded by

Ornstein and Hunkins (1993, p. 319) as ‘curriculum and instructional leaders’, should ‘spend time visiting teachers in the classroom and plan staff development programs’. Prinsloo’s (2007) study found that lack of commitment by some school principals to make Life skills Education a success in their schools undermined the successful implementation of the program. Under Life skills Education in Malawi, training was organized at the outset of the program to orient principals and their deputies to the teaching of Life skills Education and to sensitize them to the school-based support to untrained Life skills Education teachers (Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2000a).

The findings of this study concur with Ornstein and Hunkin’s (1993) argument and Prinsloo’s (2007) findings. The professional support provided by Wakwathu’s principal seems to have made a significant difference in her teaching compared to Chiutsi who indicated that she was not getting professional support from her principal.²⁰ Lack of professional support prevents Life skills Education running smoothly in the rural schools of this study.

5.4.2.3 Large class sizes

Large classes affect successful teaching of curriculum subjects (Lowe, 2008). Lowe stated that classes over 60 reduce the ability of teachers to teach and pupils to learn. Realising the fact that to teach large classes is a difficult task, ‘in sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank (1998) has recommended that classes should be no larger than 40 in the primary school’ (Lowe, 2008, p. 19). Prinsloo (2007) indicates that overcrowding in the classrooms in South Africa acts as a barrier in the process of teaching Life Orientation. Prinsloo quotes one teacher involved in his study as arguing that ‘to take care of 40 or more learners at the same time in a short period is a difficult task (and) it leads to teachers failing to create an atmosphere of personal trust between themselves and individual learners’.

²⁰ See section 4.6

The findings of this study agree with Lowe (2008) and Prinsloo (2007). Large classes are a barrier to teaching and learning of Life skills Education in the study schools with the rural schools as most affected. Chintengo rushed through discussion of feedbacks for learning activities from groups because he wanted to get feedback from all the huge number of groups which he created due to the large class size he had. Large classes are particularly of concern in Life skills Education compared with other subjects because this subject deals with development of social skills and changing of attitudes and values in learners. Development of skills and changing of attitudes requires a teacher to give each learner individual attention to ensure that the learner develops these skills. On the other hand, urban schools allocated two teachers to each of the lower classes to ease class management and facilitate learning. Wakwathu taught while her colleague M'thiko assisted with maintaining order among the learners and facilitating group work. However, learning would however have been even more facilitated if the large class had been split into two smaller classes with each of the two teachers teaching a class.

5.4.3 Social context that affects implementation of Life skills Education

5.4.3.1 Clash between community cultural beliefs and Life skills Education

Sexuality education in Life Orientation conflicts with traditional values and this resulted in the implementation of the program in the schools in South Africa receiving resistance from the community (Rooth, 2005).

The findings of this study concur with Rooth. The findings of this study show that rural communities consider that Life skills Education estranges children from their cultural roots by discouraging the children to attend initiation schools. Parents in rural communities are also opposed to illustrations on sexual development in the learning materials and discourage learners from reading such material. Teachers and school principals believe that these cultural beliefs dilute school learning by reinforcing sexual relationships, the very issues which Life

skills Education confronts. Children get opposing messages, and are confused and torn between two worlds.

5.4.3.2 Poverty and hunger

Learners' poverty and hunger undermine the implementation of a curriculum (Lowe, 2008; Fleisch, 2008). Lowe and Fleisch report that learners in rural schools in Malawi and South Africa come to school hungry and inadequately addressed, without a jersey or shoes. Because of their hunger and the cold or shame, the learners do not concentrate on what the teacher is doing. This results in low achievement of learners in curriculum subjects such as reading and mathematics.

The findings of this study concur with Lowe and Fleisch. This study found that poverty and hunger affect learning of impoverished learners from rural communities. These come to school poorly dressed and hungry. Poor dressing make learners to feel ashamed and they do not feel free in class amongst peers. They are unable to concentrate at school and sometimes the learners absent themselves from school because of lack of clothing. Due to their hunger they cannot concentrate in class and so they may learn very little or even nothing at all. Learners who are absent from school may not make sense of lessons as they are not able to link each new lesson to the preceding ones.

5.4.3.3 Poor health

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the communities affect learning of curriculum subjects (Lowe, 2008; Prinsloo, 2007). Lowe reports the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on schooling in Africa including Malawi. In Malawi, large numbers of children are orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Some of these children are also infected themselves. The orphaned children are usually farmed out to the grandparents, or to other more distant relatives, who have less interest in their education than in their 'free' labour. Children exploited for their labour is a common phenomenon in Malawi. Lowe reports that lack of food and illness are the major reasons for poor attendance at school.

Prinsloo (2007) found that many teachers in South Africa are not able to handle issues of HIV/AIDS and they avoid engaging pupils on the subject because they become uncomfortable to teach that which affect their learners.

The findings of this study agree with Lowe and Prinsloo. This study found that some teachers feel having learners in class who are affected or infected by HIV/AIDS makes the teaching of HIV/AIDS a sensitive subject. Some teachers feel that they should not teach things that affect their learners and their families. These teachers omit teaching HIV/AIDS issues in the Life skills program, thus avoiding the most crucial issues. Not addressing HIV/AIDS issues in Life skills Education undermines the implementation of the program.

5.5 Closing remarks

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the big challenges which have been presented in this chapter in the implementation of Life skills Education and in the process fail to celebrate the everyday successes in the implementation of the subject. There are several strengths that support the implementation of the program. These are valuable assets on which the implementation process for Life skills Education can build. It is important to keep these things in mind. These strengths are:

- Children are generally keen to learn.
- Generally, teachers are hard-working and dedicated, striving to do their best in very difficult conditions.
- Those teachers, like Wakwathu, who have an interest in teaching are able to overcome considerable challenges on their teaching.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a brief summary of the whole study in terms of the purpose of the study, how it was carried out, the conclusive answer to the main research question, its contribution to knowledge and recommendations.

6.2 Purpose and methodology of the study

The main aim of this study was to find out the personal, institutional and national factors that act as barriers to effective implementation of Life skills program in Standard 4 in the primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi. In order to assess how effectively the Life skills curriculum is being implemented, I reviewed literature that had a direct bearing on the purpose of this study. Issues covered in the reviewed literature covered the state of teaching and teacher education in Malawi and factors that enhance or constrain implementation of a curriculum as put forward by Cornbleth (1990) and elaborated by Whitaker (1993) and Ornstein and Hunkins (1993). The study identified key role players in the “structural” and “social” contexts of a school who influence the implementation of a curriculum. Teachers and learners were identified as key role players within the structural context of the classroom environment as influencing the implementation of a curriculum. The study argued that teachers’ dispositions towards work, their content knowledge of the curriculum, their professional development and their personal circumstances will influence the way a curriculum is implemented. The study also observed that learners’ personal circumstances such as poverty, their behaviour and proficiency in the language of classroom instruction also influences the way a curriculum is implemented. Similarly, school principals and district officials were identified as key role players within the structural context of the school organisation. The study argued that apart

from teachers and learners, the successful implementation of a curriculum is dependent on supervision of its implementation by district officials and encouragement by school principals to their teachers to treat curriculum subjects with equal significance and the principals' provision of any type of needed support to their teachers for the teaching of curriculum subjects.

The study further identified parents and community members as key role players within the social context of the school environment at large as influencing the implementation of a curriculum. The study argued that social, political, economic and demographic conditions of parents and community members will influence the way a curriculum is implemented. For example, in terms of the social conditions of the parents and community members and how these conditions influence the implementation of a curriculum, the study observed that if a curriculum clashes with the cultural beliefs of the community of the school, the teaching of such a curriculum meets some resistance from the members of the community. Similarly, the study observed that parents and community members with low levels of literacy are not able to contribute to their children's school learning and this affects the successful implementation of a curriculum. The review of literature on factors influencing the implementation of a curriculum revealed the most important fact that curriculum implementation will be enhanced when impeding aspects of the curriculum context are identified and addressed. The implementers need to plan to overcome those impeding aspects and utilise the enhancing aspects of the curriculum context. I also reviewed literature on findings of studies that have been conducted in some education systems on factors that have affected the implementation of Life skills curriculum. This was aimed at establishing in this study the extent to which similar factors impinge on implementation of the Life skills curriculum in the four state schools in the Zomba district in Malawi.

The analysis and presentation of data was guided by the factors that influence curriculum implementation.

The study used a sample of six teachers and four principals from four schools. The schools covered both rural and urban areas of Zomba district. The study used interviews as a primary source of data. Lesson observations on the teachers' teaching of Life skills were also undertaken.

6.3 The main research question:

What are the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills Education in the primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi?

Responding to the main research question, "What are the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills Education in the primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi?," the study finds that there are factors in Malawian school contexts that are hampering implementation of Life skills Education.²¹ The study has established that only Wakwathu's teaching of the Life skills program out of the four teachers whose lessons I observed, accorded more closely with what was intended by the state government as the way teachers should teach the subject.²² Recommendations for improving the implementation of the Life skills curriculum have therefore been suggested in this study.²³

6.4 Contribution made by this study

The following are regarded as contributions of this study:

- The successful implementation of Life skills depends on many factors. The study has managed to highlight the factors that may inhibit the teaching of Life skills program. These have been seen in the model adapted from Cornbleth (1990), Whitaker (1993) and Ornstein and Hunkins (1993).

²¹ See section 2.3.1

²² See section 4.14

²³ See section 6.5

- To the best knowledge of the researcher, this is the first study undertaken by a curriculum developer in the lower primary schools in Zomba district to understand the implementation of Life skills Education.

6.5 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Two day cascade model of training be reviewed and replaced by a more sustained program in which training is conducted by subject specialists and not school principals.
- A group of schools work co-operatively and design a timetable schedule for school-based In-service Training and invite curriculum developers to help the untrained teachers.
- Primary Education Advisers and Curriculum developers from the National Curriculum Development Centre focus on the depth and quality of Life skills teaching instead of merely checking the superficial aspects of school life, like timetables and files.
- A forum where teachers share how they approach the teaching of Life skills should be created, and classes of teachers who demonstrate the best practice in the teaching of the subject could be visited by other teachers.
- Some other factors such as the interest of the teacher and competence in Life skills Education should be considered before allocating the teaching of Life skills Education to teachers. There is a need to review the tradition in the schools of teachers taking up the teaching of Life skills Education because they are class teachers of a given class, expected to teach all subjects including Life skills Education in that class.
- Teachers' Guides should be written in Chichewa, the national local language of instruction, to make them user-friendly for teachers in the lower primary schools whose understanding and command of English is low. A Teachers' Guide in Chichewa would also match with the text-book in Chichewa.

- The government or Ministry of Education should supply schools with adequate resource materials such as text-books, teaching aids and stationery in order to enable teachers to implement Life skills effectively. The central government must also provide physical facilities such as classrooms and other facilities in order to create an environment in which implementation can take place.

6.6 Recommendations for further research

Further research could look at studying the following:

- The role of belief and cultural practices in Malawi and its impact on teaching and learning of Life skills Education.
- The effect of ‘foreign’ language instruction in the teaching and learning of Life skills Education.

6.7 Conclusion

This study in its small-scale nature has attempted to bring an understanding of the factors that can hinder the teaching of Life skills Education. The immediate priority must be to get implementation back on track in the primary schools studied in this research in particular and in the whole of Zomba district. The study has made some recommendations which could be used in the improvement of the implementation of the program.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 INITIAL (BEFORE LESSON OBSERVATION)

TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

APPENDIX 2 LESSON OBSERVATION FOR LIFE SKILLS

EDUCATION AND POST-LESSON FOLLOW-UP

TEACHER INTERVIEW

APPENDIX 3 SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

APPENDIX 4 COVERING LETTERS TO DISTRICT EDUCATION

MANAGER, SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND STANDARD

4 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION TEACHERS.

APPENDIX 5 LETTER OF APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

APPENDIX 6 LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE FOR RESEARCH

APPENDIX 1

Section A

Demographic data

1. Date.....
2. School pseudonym.....
2. Teacher's pseudonym.....
3. Teaching experiences.....
4. Teachers' qualifications: (a) Academic.....
(b) Professional.....

SECTION B

Part 1: Me as a teacher in Malawi

1. How did you come to be a teacher?
2. (a) What do you like about teaching as your job?
(b) What do you not like about teaching?
(c) How do those aspects of teaching that you do not like affect your performance or your ability to do the job?

Part 2: Me as a Life skills teacher and my understanding of Life skills Education program

1. How did you come to teach Life skills Education program?
2. What do you think are the goals and objectives of Life skills Education program?
Why was it started?
3. What aspect of Life skills Education is important to you? Explain your reasoning.

4. How does the non-examinable status of Life skills Education affect how well you are able to teach it? How does it influence the way that learners, parents and other members of staff regard it?
5. (a) Were you trained in Life skills Education teaching?
(b) What was the most useful part of the training and what was the least useful part of the training?
(c) How do you utilize the knowledge and skills you obtained from the training?
6. (a) What other kind of support do you receive as a Life skills Education teacher?
7. (a) What would you say are the greatest challenges facing Life skills Education teachers?
(b) How are you trying to cope with these challenges?

Part 3: Life skills Education program in the context of my school and learners

1. (a) What are the biggest challenges your learners are likely to face as they become young adults?
(b) How are you trying to prepare them for coping? Give examples
2. (a) Tell me about your learners, at present, what social difficulties do they face either as boys or as girls?
(b) What role do you as a Life skills Education teacher play in helping them deal with these social challenges? Give examples.
3. (a) Do you think that the Life skills Education program is achieving its objectives at your school?
(b) If yes, to question 3(a), in what way would you say that the program is successful?
(c) What, in your opinion, is making this program successful at your school?

(d) If no, to question (3a), in what ways do you think the program is not successful? Why is this so?

(e) If you were to change some aspects of the Life skills Education program in order to make it more effective, what would you change?

Part 4: All about my Life skills Education lessons

1. (a) What do you do at present in your lessons when teaching Life skills Education?

(b) What would you like to do better in teaching Life skills Education?

2. What aspects of Life skills Education do you find hard to teach? Explain your reasoning.

3. (a) Are there aspects of Life skills Education which you find sensitive to teach? Give examples.

(b) How do you handle the sensitive aspects in your lessons?

4. (a) At present, when teaching Life skills Education, what language do you use?

(b) When teaching Life skills Education, what language would you prefer to use? Explain.

APPENDIX 2

Part 1: Demographic data

School:..... Class:..... Number of pupils in class.....

Teacher’s pseudonym..... Gender:.....

Qualification of teacher: (a) Academic.....Professional.....Number of years as a teacher:..... Date of lesson observation

Part 2: Lesson preparation (Scheming and Lesson Planning)

(To be completed before the lesson)

1. Is Life skills Education time-tabled? Yes/No

2. Number of period allocation per week.....

3. Are schemes and records of work :

(a) available?.....

(b) updated?.....

4. Lesson plan:

(a) Is it available?.....

5. (a) What is the topic of the lesson?.....

(b) Does the lesson topic appear in the scheme for that week? Yes/No

6. What are the objectives of the lesson?.....

7. What learning activities are to be used in the lesson?

.....
.....

.....
.....

Part 4: Post-lesson follow-up teacher interview guide (to establish, through probing questions, what actually happened in the lesson to teach Life skills Education).

Examples of probing questions to be asked to the teacher concerning what actually happened in the lesson using the data obtained from the observation

1. Please tell me about your lesson which you have just taught today, what are the things that you liked about it? What are the things that you did not like?

.....
.....
.....

2. (a) Can you tell me more about the strategies (methods) you used in the lesson, how did they help your learners to learn what you wanted them to?

.....
.....

- (b) Where did you learn the strategies you used in your lesson, is it from Teacher Training College or elsewhere?

.....

3. Can you as well tell me more about how you used the learning materials (e.g. teachers' guide and learners' books and other learning resources in your lesson, how did these learning materials and resources help you to teach the lesson and your learners to learn what you wanted them to?

4. Can you also tell me more about how you addressed the social difficulties which your learners face?

.....

5. How do you know if learners develop some life skills from your lesson for them to deal with their social difficulties?

.....

.....

6. Did you reach your objectives of the lesson? Explain

.....

.....

7. How do you know if learners understand what you teach them?

.....

APPENDIX 3

Part 1: Demographic data

1. School:.....
2. Principal's pseudonym.....
3. Gender:.....
4. Qualification of principal:.....
5. Number of years as a teacher:.....
6. Number of years as principal:.....
7. Date of the interview:.....

Part 2:

1. What do you think are the goals and objectives of Life skills Education program? Why was it started?
2. How does the non-examinable status of Life skills Education influence the way that learners, parents and your members of staff regard it?
3. In your opinion, which teachers should teach Life skills Education?
Untrained teachers? Trained teachers or both? Why?
4. Which teachers teach the subject at your school?
Untrained teachers? Trained teachers or both?
5. Were you oriented or trained in Life skills Education teaching?
6. What was the most useful part of the training and what was the least useful part of the training?
7. How do you utilize the knowledge and skills you obtained from the training?

- 8. (a)** In your opinion, would you say that Life skills Education program is successful at your school? In other words, is it reaching its objectives? If yes, explain.
- (b)** If it is not successful, why is this so?
- 9.** What other kind of support do your Life skills Education teachers receive?
- 10.** If you were to change some aspects of the Life skills Education program in order to make it more effective, what would you change?

APPENDIX 4

Wits School of Education,
University of Witwatersrand,
Private Bag 3,
WITS, 2050.

12th May, 2008.

The District Educational Manager,

Zomba Education District,

P.O. Zomba,

Malawi.

Dear Sir,

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN FOUR STATE
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN YOUR DISTRICT, ZOMBA RURAL.**

My name is Mr. G. W. Chirwa, a Master in Education student (in Curriculum Studies) at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. I am working as a curriculum developer at Malawi Institute of Education, Zomba, but I am currently on study leave. I want to conduct a research on investigation of the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills Education curriculum for lower primary school in four of the state primary schools in your educational district in order for me to complete my research report for my degree.

I hereby wish to request permission to conduct my study in four schools in your district. My study will involve observing Standard 4 Life skills Education lessons, lesson follow up interviews with the teachers I will be observing and interviewing the school principals of the

schools. I will request the teachers and the school principal to sign a consent form accepting involvement in my research.

I intend to protect the anonymity of the school to be involved in the research, the teachers' anonymity and the Head teachers' anonymity. I will do this by using fictitious (not real) names for the schools, the teachers and the Head teachers.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Grames Chirwa

Wits School of Education,
University of Witwatersrand,
Private Bag 3,
WITS, 2050.
12th May, 2008.

The Principal,

Zomba,

Malawi.

Dear Sir/Madam,

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL IN
AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 2008.**

My name is Mr. G. W. Chirwa, a Master in Education student (in Curriculum Studies) at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. I am working as a curriculum developer at Malawi Institute of Education, Zomba, but I am currently on study leave. I want to conduct a research on investigation of the challenges facing the implementation of Life skills Education curriculum for the lower primary school.

I hereby wish to request permission to conduct my study in your school. My study will involve observing Standards 4 Life skills Education lessons, lesson follow up interviews with the teachers I will be observing. I will also request to have an interview with you which is related to the topic of my study. I will request you and the teachers to sign a consent form accepting involvement in my research. I have also sought the permission of the District Education Manager to conduct research in your school.

I intend to protect the anonymity of your school, the teachers' anonymity and yourself. I will do this by using fictitious (not real) names for your school, the teachers and yourself.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Grames Chirwa

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

Dear Colleague,

I am a Master of Education student in the School of Education at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. I am conducting a small-scale research qualitative study on the topic of *“Investigating the hole in the holistic education program: Challenges facing the teaching of Life skills Education in primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi.”*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the problems teachers may be facing in teaching this subject – an idea based on the hypothesis that improvements in teaching and learning of any subject can only be achieved if the problems which teachers are facing and other conditions in the education system which are inhibiting successful teaching of the subject are identified which may later bring in appropriate interventions to ensure the successful teaching of the subject.

I am requesting you to participate in this study. However, the following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

- You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time, without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the University of the Witwatersrand.
- The activities you will be involved in are participating in a semi-structured interview in a Focus Group Discussion with three other Life skills Education teachers from three other primary schools in Zomba district. This will take a maximum of **1 hour and 30 minutes**. The second activity is that I will observe **2** of your Life skills Education **30 minute lessons in 2 days** (1 lesson per day following your school subject time-table. The last activity is for you to participate in is a post-lesson interview after I observe your second lesson. This interview will take a maximum of **1 hour**. Your total time of participation in the research

is approximately **3 hours and 30 minutes in 3 days**. This means that your participation time per day in the research is approximately **1 hour and 30 minutes**.

- For the sake of protecting your identity, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way and only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

Your benefits as a participant will be information that the study is apt to generate as we discuss the subject of the teaching of Life skills Education at your school and the opportunity to participate in the study.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study, either before participating or during the time that you are participating.

Please, sign this consent form with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Name of participant.....

Signature of participant.....

Date

Grames Chirwa /Researcher

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPE RECORDING TEACHER INTERVIEWS

I invite you to participate in an interview in my study on the topic, “Investigating “the hole” in the holistic education program: challenges facing the teaching of Life skills program in primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi.

The interview will take about **1 hour**. I would like to audio tape record what transpires in the interview. I therefore request for your permission for me to audio tape record our discussions in the interview. Please sign below if you have accepted to be audio tape recorded.

I give consent to the following:

- (a) Being interviewed in the study
- (b) Being audio tape recorded during the interview.

Signature of the teacher:-----Date:-----

Signature of the researcher:----- Date:-----

CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a Master of Education student in the School of Education at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. I am conducting a small-scale research qualitative study on the topic of “*An investigation of ‘the hole’ in the holistic education program: Challenges facing the teaching of Life skills Education in primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi.*”

The purpose of this study is to investigate the problems teachers may be facing in teaching this subject – an idea based on the hypothesis that improvements in teaching and learning of any subject can only be achieved if the problems which teachers are facing and other conditions in the education system which are inhibiting successful teaching of the subject are identified which may later bring in appropriate interventions to ensure the successful teaching of the subject.

I am requesting you to participate in this study. However, the following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

- You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time, without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the University of the Witwatersrand.
- The activity you will be involved in is a semi-structured individual interview with you and this will take a maximum of **1 hour on an agreed day and time.**
- For the sake of protecting your identity, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way and only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

Your benefits as a participant will be information that the study is apt to generate as we discuss the subject of the teaching of Life skills Education at your school and the opportunity to participate in the study.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study, either before participating or during the time that you are participating.

Please, sign this consent form with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Name of participant.....

Signature of participant..... Date

Grames Chirwa /Researcher

**CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPE RECORDING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’
INTERVIEWS**

I invite you to participate in an interview in my study on the topic, “Investigating ‘the hole’ in the holistic education program: challenges facing the implementation of Life skills Education curriculum in the primary schools in Zomba district, Malawi.”

The interview will take about 1 hour. I would like to audio tape record what transpires in the interview. I therefore request for your permission for me to audio tape record our discussions in the interview.

Please sign below if you have accepted to be audio tape recorded.

I give consent to the following:

- (a) Being interviewed in the study
- (b) Being audio tape recorded during the interview.

Signature of the principal: -----Date:-----

Signature of the researcher:----- Date:-----

APPENDIX 5

APPENDIX 6