

**MANAGING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN A CENTRALIZED EDUCATION SYSTEM IN
FULFILLING NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS: EXPERIENCES OF
SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL MANAGERS IN SOUTH EAST EDUCATION
DIVISION, MALAWI.**

By

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for the Degree of Master of Education in Leadership and Management**

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DECLARATION

I, Violet Duwa declare that the organization and writing of this dissertation is entirely My own and has been carried out at Mzuzu University under the supervision of Doctor Margaret Maligzani Mdolo. It has not been, nor is it being concurrently submitted for any other degree than the Degree of Master Education (Leadership and Management) of Mzuzu University.

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DEDICATION

To God the author of my story and guarantor of life, where I get the wisdom and intelligence and strength to keep going. My Dad who always trust that I can do bigger things and always been my greatest support, I dedicate this work to you.

ABSTRACT

It is a well-known fact that education management in any country is considered as very imperative as far as improvement of student's achievement at school is concerned. A country's development is also partly brought about by high levels of literacy, when people are educated, they are in a better position to become better citizens, take care of themselves and seek for jobs hence satisfying their needs. This makes education very important. Education therefore needs to be well managed in order to meet the satisfaction of the national education goals and make students equally competitive. The researcher however observed that there are a number of factors that affect the way managers are able to operate to effectively make sure that education management is fulfilled. In Malawi for example, Schools are expected to fulfill the National Education Standards, but as one factor this can be hindered by the type of education system adapted. The purpose of the study was to investigate management of secondary schools in a centralized system while fulfilling the effective practices of the National Education Standards. The research used case study design while adopting a qualitative approach within the interpretivism paradigm which helped the researcher to have a deeper understanding of each case by gathering insights and experiences from selected secondary school managers. The study was guided by a conceptual framework derived from two management theories namely bureaucratic and structural theories. The schools which participated were sampled from the South East Education Division (SEED). Data was collected through two methods, interviews and document analysis. The instruments were piloted before actual data collection and Prior to data collection, consent was sought from MZUNIREC which gave ethical clearance and every participant was asked to sign a consent form of agreement to take part in the study and confidentiality was assured. The collected data was properly managed by storing it in different forms like audios, written notes, pictures to prevent it from getting lost or to avoid tampering with it. Then the data was analyzed thematically, the findings of the study were that some managers have an understanding of the National Education Standards and it was revealed that Malawian Secondary schools are managed under a highly centralized system, it was noted that the system brings in complications on management and the achievement of the National education standards and that factors like inadequate resources, knowledge gap, lack of cooperation between managers and their subordinates have effects on the achievement of the National Education Standards.

Key words: Education Management, Education centralization, National Education standards.

NOMENCLATURE

MZUNIREC.....Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee

MoE..... Ministry of Education

NES.....National Education Standards

NDP..... National Decentralization Policy

SEED..... South East Education Division

OECD..... Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

MOEST.....Ministry of Education Science and Technology

PTA.....Parents, Teacher Association

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

The operational definitions presented in this study are as follows:

Educational Management

Field of study and practice concerned with the operation of educational organizations centrally concerned with the purpose or aims of education

Education decentralization

The process of concentrating authority and decision making in the center or at the top of the hierarchy of an organization for example teachers making the curricula for the students (Nir, 2020).

Education decentralization

World Bank, 2011 defines decentralization as strengthening democratization, cultural and indigenous rights, local accountability and local governance.

Education Standards

Standards are reference points for teaching and learning programs and for assessing students' progress.

Education System

Economic and social factors that typically make up public schools at the federal, state or community level

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter presents the background of a centralized education system, the status of the education system in Malawi for secondary schools, provides the background of the introduction of National Educational Standards, states the problem of the research and the objectives of the study, justifies why the research was steered, and outlines the frame work which the research was based.

1.1. Background

Educational centralization refers to the condition where the central government of a country has complete power and control over the education system. Centralization offers administrative authority not to the local community, but in the central body. The central body has supremacy over almost every resource. These include people, money, information, technology (Brennen, 2002). Not only that, the central office decides the content of the curriculum, controls the budget, it is responsible for recruitment, building of educational facilities, discipline as well as policies.

Centralization provides for maximum control over the entire organization, as such it ensures that work is performed in the same manner and in accordance with the same general policies and principles (Marume and Jubenkanda, 2016). Some writers add to say education centralization develops uniformity of management since the phase of planning, management, evaluation and development of model of school and learning gets more integrated (Krsen & Gustav 1999, Gyorgyi, 2015). It is also believed that local government units lack expertise and personnel to run local education services smoothly (Acta Educationis Genaralis, 2018) as such schools are run better in centralized systems to minimize the need for more human capital.. On the other side, its cons are that, there is limited coordination of policy plans articulated by the government through the Ministry of Education with administrators on the ground (Nir, 2020). It also minimizes the role of involvement of individuals in the bottom levels, decisions and policies made by the top are implemented at the bottom (Brennen,

2002). Within this system, division of labor, structure and basis of the authority, the position and job description of each employee, rules regulating the relationship of people at different positions are already determined and leads to autocratic control over subordinates (Marume and Jubenkanda, 2016). This fails to give school managers the ability to engage themselves, be creative and resourceful in problem solving. Not only that, the centralized system makes the response to local educational needs very slow. Managing many and complex organizations such as schools is almost impossible in this system because it does not fit in current trends of educational management of team work and shared decision making, that is rendering to (Brennen 2002).

To understand Management, it is also important to know its significance and the difference it makes to the school. Management affects how schools are run and its final outcomes (Bush, 2005). Management is looked at in different dimensions, it is an executive position for carrying out agreed education policy, also connected with the internal operations of education institutions (Bush, 2005). The core responsibility lies at policy and transformation of schools while maintaining a good relationship with their environment. Management does not entail a single thing or responsibility, it is a set of activities directed towards efficient and effective utilization of organizational resources in order to achieve organizational goals (Sapre, 2002). Governments have the constitutional power to impose their will, but successful innovations require the commitment of those who have to implement these changes (Bush, 2015). Dermirtas and Karaca (2020) agrees that management consists of different activities and categorized them in three main processes namely Technical, Human and Conceptual. Technical skills of a manager refer to the functional specialization or expertise in a specific area. The Human skills refers to interpersonal relationships and how successful a manager is in terms of planning, directing, coordinating and controlling other peoples' activities in order to achieve some orchestrated outcomes and finally the conceptual skills define the managers ability to see the organization as a whole. All the skills are significant across all hierarchical levels (Demirtas & Karaca, 2020). Sometimes management is mistaken by leadership but the two overlap, managing well often exhibits leadership skills. Educational management is also in different types, so different countries have a choice of which type or system they would follow depending on the needs of the people and the set educational goals, these types include

Centralized and decentralized educational management, External and Internal Educational management, Authoritarian/Autocratic and democratic educational management and creative educational management.

Current status of the Malawian Education System

Governments in several developing countries for example Malaysia and Tanzania have given serious consideration to decentralization of education. (World Bank, 2013). Just as other countries, Malawi adopted its decentralization policy after about thirty years of a highly centralized one-party rule. In 1998 a decision to decentralize primary school education came in by ministry of local government which passed a policy called “*the national decentralization policy (NDP)* (Local Government Act, 1998). One of the reasons of such a policy was to promote good governance. The assumption of the policy was to make districts able to make decisions. Decentralization is supposed to make district offices responsible and accountable for activities in the district (Kufaine & Mtapuri, 2004). After 2 decades since the decentralization policy, it was noted however that there is a limit to which power was given to officials at district level. The structure of education still remains the top-down approach but it was supposed to go as far as schools, after decentralization the structure tranquil seems to end at the district as of now. Studies have shown that the district education office has little or no power over some issues for example, curriculum content, teachers’ disciplinary action, recruitment and promotion (Chiweza, 2010). These powers that are not decentralized affects the operation of managers either at district level or school level (kufaine et al., 2004).

Chimombo, (2014) had also found that in cases of school management, teachers who are supposed to have authority to make decisions at school are undermined, as such implementation of decentralization in Malawi has been seen as a challenge (Nampuri,2014) or in other words our education system is practically still operating bureaucratically. This contradicts to the definition of management by North house (2016) who defined it as exercising authority, making decisions as well as directing and coordinating tasks relevant to institutional goals. The Malawi Education Act (2013) is also another clear evidence of a centralized system of education in Malawi. It is the minister of education who has the highest

authority as regard to policy making and administration of both the primary and secondary curricula is concerned.

It is also important to note that the decentralization policy only apply to the primary education. Governance and management of primary education has been decentralized with most of the powers devolved to local councils whilst that of secondary schools still remain bureaucratic but the desire is to move towards full decentralization. Since the legislation made by Malawi government only decentralized primary education, it entails that secondary education teacher qualifications, salaries, transfers, promotions, appointments, rules and regulations, transfers and many other administrative duties rests in control of the central office. These therefore have a direct or indirect touch to school management. Whether an education system is run centrally or decentralized, the effects end up affecting management of schools and its outcomes.

However, in a study done in Indonesia, it was noted that not only the above factors can affect school management but also factors like competence of school principals/heads, curriculum development, entrepreneurship, training, community participation and local potential can also in one or another affect school management (Zakso, Agung & Sulistiono, 2020).

For the first time Malawi in the year 2015, came up with a set of National Education Standards (NES) to help the education sector improve the quality of learning, teaching, leadership and management of the schools. The standards clearly articulate the educational experiences and achievements which students and their paternities should expect their schools to deliver. The NES are organized into outcomes for students, teaching and learning process and leadership and management categories. For each category, these standards are presented in 4 achievement levels: below minimum, meeting minimum, exceeding minimum and effective practice levels. A well- run school should be operating within the effective practice achievement level for all categories including management. Therefore, the NES acts as a measure for checking attainment of the norms and good practices in schools at both primary and secondary level. The standards under management of secondary schools include: partnership with parents and the community, staff supervision and development, care and

welfare of students, access equity and inclusion, management of buildings and facilities and financial management. This study therefore understands these eight standards under management and their effective practices, the particular specifications and effective practices are achievable and some schools have a record of this achievement but may also be challenging for schools running in a centralized system.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Operating in a centralized system, Malawian secondary school managers cannot hire or fire teachers, promote or demote teachers, cannot dismiss teachers or students on discipline issues, neither can they transfer, in some instances they can only recommend. However, the effective practice, achievement level 4 on management category in the NES, requires school managers who have the autonomy to carry out some of these duties decisively. So, how are school managers discharging their duties? This leaves a lot to be flabbergasted. It is therefore for this reason that this study was conceptualized, to assess how secondary school managers are performing their duties guided by the NES while working in a centralized education system. Good management of a school is vital to ensuring that students have a positive school experience as they are important human capital as mentioned in the Malawi vision 2063.

1.3. Objectives

The main objective of the study was to assess how the selected school managers are discharging their duties to achieve the effective practice level for the National Education Standards under management by looking at experiences of secondary school managers working within the centralized education system.

The specific objectives were:

- To investigate how managers describe the management system they are operating on and their understanding of the National Education Standards under management.

- To analyze the implication of managing secondary schools in a centralized system in fulfilling effective practices of the NES under management.
- To identify factors affecting the achievement of effective practices on NES under management.

1.4. Justification

The findings of this study may bring awareness to the ministry of education on issues enhancing or impeding achievement of the effective practice level of NES under management category. School managers may be helped to find better ways of making sure that their schools are able to reach the required standards of managing secondary schools. The study may also help the ministry of education to deploy the decentralization policy to secondary schools if necessary in order to improve governance. In addition to these, this study provides arguments for supporting the need to decentralize secondary school subsector as envisioned in the key priority issues number 23 and 24 of the Final Malawi National Education Sector Plan (2020-2030).

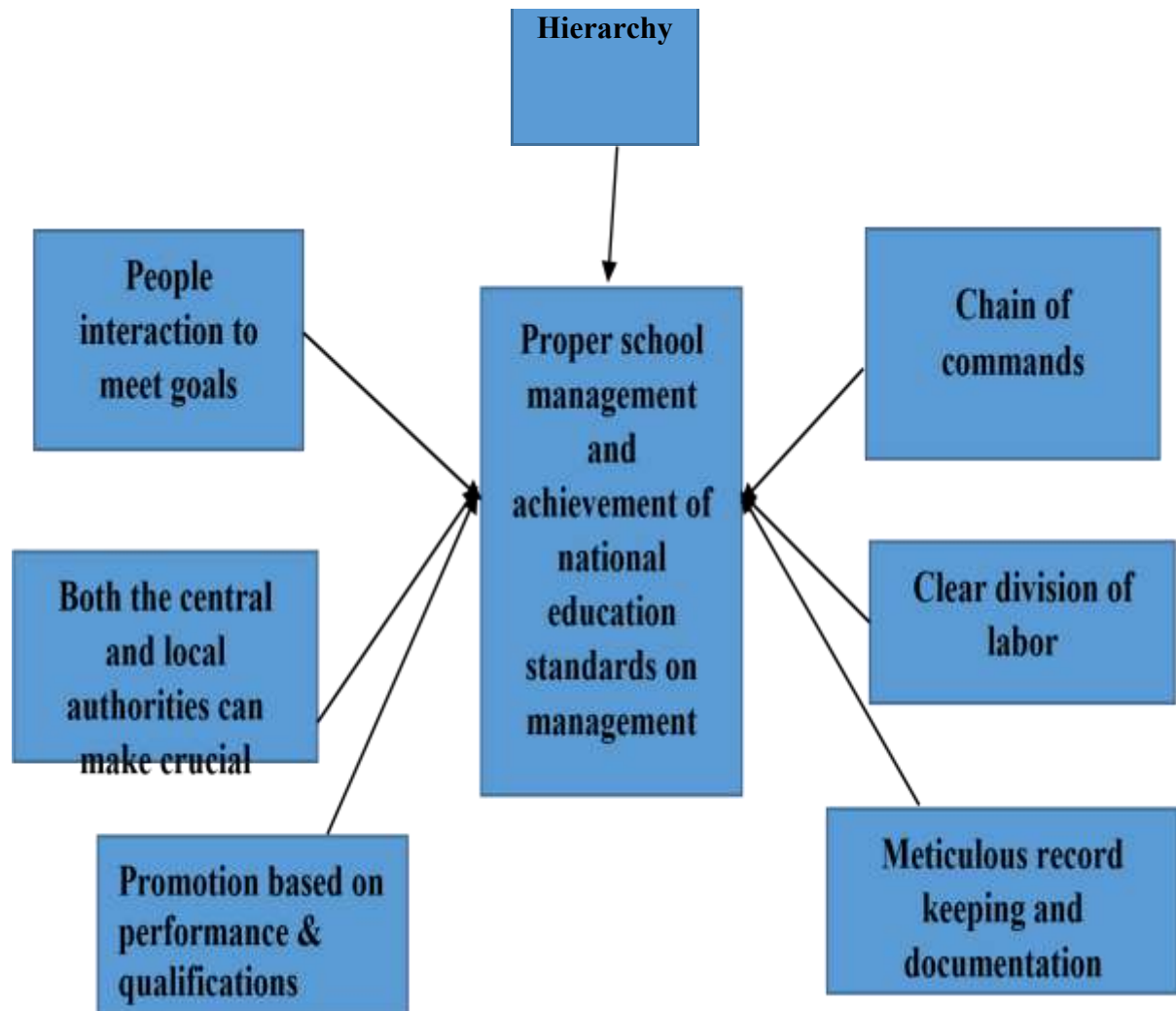
1.5 Conceptual framework

Theories are there to give general explanations and direct users or researchers on research. A conceptual or theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed for a research study (Grand and Osanloo, 2014). Most of them are generalized and abstract, so a theory can be true or false according to the context it is used (Tasic, 2011). Every theory therefore becomes useful if it creates the right anticipation of some events. No specific framework was suitable for this study but several had aspects which could make sense to what this study was all about. However, concepts from 2 theories of management were used to guide the study. The first theory is the structural theory, which looks at the head of the organization having the central authoritative role (Daft, 2010). Of great interest in this theory is the prominence of official structure of the organization where managerial decisions are made through a rational process. The structure is assumed to have 5 organizational levels (Bush, 2020) which also relates to the work of Bencher and Kogan back in 1992. The top level includes the national and local authorities while at the bottom are institutions or

individuals. This is similar to the structure in Malawian Secondary Education which has the government and its Ministerial roles at the central office or top of the structure and the schools and school managers at the very bottom of the structure. The second theory is the Bureaucratic theory which was developed by Max Weber (1864-1920). This theory also focuses on the hierarchy of organizations and so there are clear rules of governance. Of great interest is the strict rules and regulations, great autonomy of those on top, division of labor, meticulous record keeping and documentation which is usually used by inspectors when they visit schools to check progress on the National Education Standards. Bureaucracy also advocates the selection of employs based on performance and qualification which is not usually the case with Head teachers managing secondary schools which in turn may affect the way secondary schools are managed and the achievement of the National Education Standards. Therefore, the framework that guided this research shows the relationships of the two theories both having an implication on school management.

The conceptual framework





The two theories apply to the study since they both believe in having a structured hierarchy which runs from the top (central) to bottom (school administration) which also relates to a centralized education system. The components of theories appear in the structure of the education system secondary schools are run in Malawi. Sometimes the system seem partially centralized and authority does not only come from the apex but even those managers at local/district offices can make decisions for example at divisional level. People interact within the organization in order to achieve goals, this is what the structural theory advocates, in other words people help each other in realizing the goals without specifying whose responsibility it might be. The bureaucratic system gives clear division of labor and commands come in a chain through the established hierarchy and the ministry of education often use this idea. In a bureaucratic system, workers are recruited and promoted based on performance and

qualifications and thus demanding meticulous documentation of records and other important documents. Documentation has been an identity of the teaching profession and recently the government has introduced the appraising of teachers so that promotions should be based on their performance and qualifications agreeing to the concept of the bureaucratic theory. All these in turn affects the management of schools and drives school managers to exercise their duties in line with the demands of the system.

1.6 Scope of study and delimitations

Research delimitations are important because they define parameters within which the research should be conducted. These become the boundaries of the study and sometimes entails the ways in which the findings may lack generalizability (Joyner, William, and Glatthorn, 2013). This study focused on qualified head teachers and deputy heads who are involved in managing conventional secondary schools in the South East Education Division of Malawi (SEED). The main focus being on only those who are qualified and have experience on the position. In view of the sample size that was used, the findings of this research therefore cannot be generalized.

Conclusion

This chapter has in brief presented background of the study, an overview of the problem clarifying the need for the study, statement of the problem, the aim of the study from which the research objectives were designed, justification and significance of the study which shows the benefit of the study to the school, the government and other education stakeholders, delimitation and the theoretical framework that guided the study.

2.0. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides literature on the understanding of the concepts of educational management, centralized education system, National Education Standards and the

implications that a centralized education system has on school management as well as possible factors that can affect management and the effective accomplishment of set Education standards.

2.1. Educational Management

Educational management Conferring to the Malawi Secondary School Management Handbook (2014) is about making things work to produce the expected learning outcomes. The aspects of good school management include, planning that's where a leader sets objectives to meet specific goals. Organizing, like placing teachers and support staff in relative positions. Mobilizing, making sure that schools have appropriate facilities and resources. Motivating, controlling as well as directing, making sure there is proper supervision and evaluation.

Some experts who explained the meaning of management are Frederick W. Tylor and Henry Fayol. Educational management as influenced by their views, Taylor recommends the use of performance standards in management, these standards are school achievement of the expected labor productivity and the goals to be achieved (Surya, 2011). In line to this approach is the Malawi NES, (2015). It focuses on practical actions of the school set as standards to make sure that managers follow so that students attain a positive school experience. These managerial actions include; efficient and effective use of resources like finances, materials and buildings, staff development, supervision, welfare, managing behavior, setting school vision and values that focuses on students becoming self-reliant as well as making sure that policies are put in place and staff members are implementing them.

The other management expert Fayol, in his book "*General and Industrial Administration*" put management as being able to plan, organize, command and coordinate and to control. He adds to say educational management is the art of getting work done within a given budget, within given deadlines, with the help of other people (Mazin & Ibrahim, 2017). As an academic discipline it refers to the substantive body of knowledge, concepts, theories, laws and their application to practice.

Education management deals with administering all the affairs considered in academe (Ewegbenro, 2015) and usually education managers are not given teaching assignments so that they focus fully on the affairs of the school, the non-teaching affairs according to Elizabeth Ewegbenro include; handling salaries, maintenance of school buildings and equipment which is also in agreement to the NES. This requires planning, organizing, controlling the activities of an institution by utilizing both human and material resources so as to effectively and efficiently accomplish functions of teaching and learning.

From the different views of people, educational management basically is the implementation of managing principles in the education sector and the process consist of 3 basic functions of planning, implementing and controlling. A manager uses these functions to achieve educational goals and objectives.

2.2. Importance of Educational Management

Educational management is very important because knowing how to manage education helps managers to run educational institutions professionally which helps in decision making and problem solving (Prakash, 2015). It is also a way of creating institutions of excellence so that a vast majority of students can benefit from the training they get from school, not only that, policies at national level focuses on economic and cultural development through forecasting, planning, organizing and controlling and the best way to achieve the development of such spheres is through human resource development.

The field of education to a larger extent is expected to provide society with human resources which have specialized knowledge, attitudes, work ethics, social, moral and political values to sustain and enhance the expected development of a nation (Ewegbenro, 2015). Education tends to enable students to bring about desirable social change and at the same time preserve desirable and positive aspects of existing culture and fulfil the stated roles of education and national developmental goals, as such there is need to manage education and move beyond the traditional role of academics and its values and work towards bringing about qualitative changes in the educational system.

2.3. Centralized education System

The field of education cannot be deemed important if it is not effective, so many researchers have tried to identify over the years what could be the best way to achieving effectiveness. During the years, a well-known phenomenon of decentralization has become a certainty and has led to the abandon of educational centralization in order to achieve effectiveness especially in governance. Despite centralization of education receiving much critics, some countries still remain centralized and that include Malawi in its secondary school education.

A centralized education system is an organizational design by which the manager and other workers work within a hierarchical, predictable system (Glower & Law, 2003). Within this system, division of labor structure and job descriptions of employees, rules regulating the relationship of people at different positions are determined within the hierarchical framework. Centralization have been also understood within the context of power, it describes the pattern and distribution of power to single or central point within the system and control of the decision-making process resides in the hand of a few within the organization. Centralization is linked to bureaucracy which means that central authority is responsible for decision making on various matters and only programmed small responsibilities and routines are left to the lower levels in the organization to handle. This is derived from the 1924 Max Weber's bureaucratic theory which places legitimate authority to only top most officials. In centralized education, all educational decisions and policies are all round uniform. It is the top-level officials that administrative authority for education is vested.

In a centralized education system, the lower levels also called field offices cannot act on their initiative on specific matters, they have to refer most of their problems to higher levels (called headquarters) for decision making (Marume and Jubenkanda, 2016). In a paper trying to look at why decentralization? Or Centralization? Javed Iqbal Shah studied a number of motives of centralization of which one was "power". Within the same context of power, Shah, (2010) explains that centralization may be regarded as concentration of power at the top level of an organization, he continued to say extreme cases of centralization is usually labelled as "one

man rule”. Quoting from Yazdi, (2013) educational centralization was also called “central planning administration” where the central authorities are responsible for developing curriculum framework and choosing or generating learning sources and delegating the curriculum tasks to decentralized levels of the educational system. The administrative authority at local or regional level is taken up by the central government .A study conducted in Botswana on ‘centralization of Education in Botswana’ indicated that in their centralized education system, the state acted as a sole provider, controller and regulator of almost everything. It was the state exercising authority through regulation of the constitution and individual behaviors by allocating resources to the public education system (Yezo, 2013).

The extent to which education is decentralized or centralized vary from one country to another, centralization appears in dimensions depending on what is dominant and according to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2019 report, having a loose dimension or lesser powers decentralized makes decentralization meaningless. The following therefore are some of the types of centralization.

Highly centralized, in this type, it is the central government holds the responsibility of top management that makes most decision of organizations with very little input from lower level employees. This is sometimes referred to as the higher ups management. Those below the hierarchy must follow orders from the upper administrators.

The other type is departmental centralization, this type of centralization is based within an organization. Each department has a head office or leader who makes decisions for that department.

There is also management centralization, this is said to be the most common, and this is when one person or one department makes all decisions of an entire organization.

Centralization can similarly be geographical, this is the location of authority in locations, regions, districts and various areas. Each location has its own leader or group of leaders who are trusted to make decisions for that location. This can be seen in the different education

divisions running secondary schools in Malawi. It is the EDM who is located as the boss for a particular region and controls specific number of schools found in that region.

2.3.1. Limitations of centralized education system

Education centralization takes out democracy, this is largely because decisions are not made at the school but are attached with political decisions. People's rights are exploited, the needs of people when coming up with rules and curriculum are not imbedded, stakeholders are not involved and there is minimal or very little consultation. Lack of stakeholder participation takes out accountability.

Centralized education has direct impact on the curriculum. The curriculum is rigid and cannot be modified by the users even if it can be faulty. This leads to delivery of irrelevant content since managers of schools and teachers work only in compliance to what they have been given. Standardization of practices and the curriculum fails to realize that education is diverse and needs innovations and changes according to context but centralization reduces legitimacy for innovations.

The system is said to limit other stakeholders from participation and involvement which far ahead increases administrative burdens and organizational complexity. Since one office is expected to do everything that others, administration cannot expand and it doesn't allow development of other people at the bottom.

Bush (2011) also wrote to concur with others that centralization limits the roles of school managers, for example in Malawi the role of appointing/dismissing teachers, determining teachers' salaries, raises, allocation of funds, establishing disciplinary actions and policies does not rest in the hands of school heads. And since the school managers does not own innovations but simply required to implement extremely imposed changes, they are likely to do so without enthusiasm leading to possible failure (Bush, 2011).

It also decreases lateral relations according to Herman, (2018), the increased concentration of authority and hierarchical relations throughout the system would decrease the extent and importance of lateral relations, this can weaken the vertical relationships since each level in

the hierarchy has autonomous relationships evaluation and inspection becomes a problem. It would also lower the number and complexity of environmental relations for each level which in a way lowers independence.

Trusting one or a few people with everything lowers accountability and monitoring and in this way resources such as money are easily abused. A study which was conducted in Hungary on the goals and consequences of Centralization of Public Education for example, revealed that Hungary's government did not clearly define the intended outcomes and expected benefits of centralization, no stakeholders were involved in the preparation stage, no pilot was conducted before its introduction, no feasibility study and impact analysis and the conclusion was that it might be that centralization had a hidden agenda (Herman, 2018). Or it might happen that it has undeclared hidden objectives which can be abused.

Managers end up not knowing the size of their budgets which makes financial planning practically impossible. The result being that head teachers are always conscious of over spending and other constraints for example, the budgets are not fixed and it happens that a school does not receive any funding from the government for more than 3 consecutive months, in trying to survive, school managers cut costs by skipping or ignoring other activities which might equally be important. The lagging in financing also makes development and maintenance of infrastructure difficult, managers have difficulties even to get resources from the central office to cover material expenses of the schools (Herman, 2018).

Centralization compromises with job satisfaction. Compensation management has been advocated to be a way of bringing satisfaction on a job and in turn employees become happy and productive (Osibanjo, Adeniyi, Falola & Heirmac, 2014). To the researchers view, teachers' wages deserve a particular attention to enhance job satisfaction. This is highly related to quality of education teachers deliver to learners, in absence of compensations and incentives teachers prefer jobs with more privileges. It becomes the job of a school manager to device ways of motivating the staff members, unfortunately with such constraints the head teacher is tied and awaits on the Ministry of Education at headquarters to implement.

Centralization according to Osborne and Gaebler (1993) brings in laziness and relaxation on the job. People are guaranteed of not losing their job easily so generally they relax. It takes issues to pass through the whole hierarchy before it reaches to the top Manager at the central office to take action.

PISA (2015) a study done in most middle- and high-income countries revealed that schools whose principles are more responsible of their schools are not limited in terms of shaping their working conditions. They are more responsible for governance and their students scored higher in sciences. This can rarely happen in a centralized education system.

Lovenen,(2017) however applauds centralization, it is said to ensure economy in administration by avoiding duplication of work, makes administrative abuses very difficult in matters like employment and handling of personnel, purchase and use of resources just to mention but a few.

2.4. Decentralization

Educational decentralization on the other hand, as put by Kufaine (2014) means the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resource raising and allocation from the central government and its agencies to lower levels of government. In decentralization power is close to where work is done, it aims at transferring resources and authority from higher to lower levels of government (European commission, 2016). To understand it better, in decentralization there is devolution of authority, devolution is believed to be the strongest form of decentralization, and it encompasses the transfer of authority over financial administrative or pedagogical matters from higher to lower levels of government such as regional governing bodies, local governing bodies such as municipalities or districts and schools. (Ortiz, 2006). As illustrated by Ortiz there is indeed a shift of responsibilities to lower level but the central government remain in control.

Just as centralization, decentralization comes in different forms and different institutions may adopt a certain type depending with its goals and reasons for decentralization. Decentralization can be political which aims at giving citizens more power in decision making, it promotes democracy by allowing citizens or followers to have representatives who can influence the formation and implementation of policies (Litvack, 1998).

And then there is administrative decentralization, this decentralization believes in redistributing authority among different levels of government or education institutions (Litvack, 1998), good examples are de-concentration, delegation and devolution.

Fiscal decentralization makes sure that local governments have adequate revenue either raised locally or transferred from the central government as well allowing local authorities to be able to make decisions about expenditure (Ortiz, 2006).

The different forms might differ according to departments and choosing the most appropriate form of decentralization depends on where the power is being devalued, it is not standardized and not always efficient.

2.4.1. Advantages of decentralization

Many advantages have been attached to decentralization, for example, Brennen (2002) elucidated that decentralization promotes greater parental and community involvement for a better understanding of the problems schools face, it also gives high morale and commitment to people implementing organizational goals and visions since they keep in mind that it is their own strategic plans for the curricula being implemented. Not only that, there is great accountability and evaluation of progress since evaluation is done at individual schools or the nearest office for example at the division's office. The concept of decentralization has been used as one of reform initiatives to enhance governance (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017), to improve school management efficiency and to cater to localized needs. Decentralization is believed to reduce the fatigue in decision making, increased efficiency of government and its responsibilities to local needs which in turn improves service delivery (Bjork, 2006).

2.4.3. Disadvantages of Decentralization

Decentralization however, may increase corruption in the education sector at local levels due to involvement in decision making of certain policies and procedures (Nunakhir, 2016). It may also discourage the obedience or royalty to the national identity since more of tasks are entrusted to the local government rather than the central government (Saito, 2001).

In real life though, we seldom find any system that is similar to pure centralization where all decisions can be taken by a single person, or having a pure decentralization where everyone can be actively involved in decision making. The advantages of one tend to be the disadvantages of the other, so we can say centralization only takes place to a certain extent, if division of power exist between the state, region or local governments in education matters but a greater extent of decisions are concentrated in the Ministry of Education, the system is centralized.

2.5. National Education Standards

Ministry of Education Science and Technology Malawi (MoEST) introduced the NES to support the process of school improvement. Four areas were identified as important indicators of success, these are Outcomes for learners, the teaching process, Leadership and Management. Under management section, there are 8 standards namely; partnership with parents and the community, staff supervision and development, staff deployment and management, care and welfare of students, access, equity and inclusion, management of buildings and facilities, management of material resources and financial management. One can be assessed on each standard on four different levels but the expected level for good school management is the last level, level 4. At this level, management is deemed effective.

The set targets assist in informing the development of school improvement plans. The NES were also put to serve as a reference for the work of policy makers and other development partners in education as they strive towards achieving educational change and reforms across the country. And in order to achieve that, they were set in accordance to the constitution of Malawi section 25 which demands that every person is entitled to education and that schools or institutions offering education should be maintained according to official standards and in

alignment to the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDSII) as well as the National Education Sector Plan of 2008-2017. The standards were outlined while taking into account the goals and objectives of education in Malawi.

Specifying standards was believed to enable accurate and comprehensive reporting on the quality of education, the Inspection and Advisory Services measure compliance using the standards and refer to it when reporting to MoEST the extent to which the standards are being implemented in schools (NES, 2015). As a matter of interest to the study, the study only focused on specific standards under management. In brief these standards serve a purpose of aiding policy makers at national, divisional and district level in education to be able to evaluate effectiveness and guide in reviewing and improving their practice.

Table1: Summary of expected effective outcomes by the NES on management standards

Standard	Effective practices
1. Staff supervision and development	• Senior staff use the outcomes of staff appraisal and supervision when planning school-based in-service. • Feedback from lesson observations is used to check that advice given during supervision is implemented. • The head teacher and senior staff regularly analyze how well classes are doing. • The head teacher and senior staff have received training relevant to their management responsibilities.
2. Staff deployment and management	• Staff are deployed within the school in line with their training, experience and skills. • Senior managers work very effectively with staff at all levels to improve the quality of students' educational experiences

3. Effective management of behavior	• Have high expectations of students' behavior • Act authoritatively and decisively when necessary • Use a range of strategies, including praise, sanctions and rewards to motivate and manage students • Use positive approaches to managing behavior and treat students with respect
4. Financial management	• The school has a history of financial stability and audits have not found any problems. • The community accounts for the funds it manages. • Schools with bank accounts meet all relevant financial regulations and have effective systems for monitoring and accounting for funds
5. Partnership with parents and the community	• Parents and community members are aware of the strengths of the school and its priorities for improvement, and help to implement school plans. • The school communicates regularly with parents and the community about its activities, challenges and achievements. • The school is actively involved in community life and the community makes use of its facilities. • The community makes a significant contribution to fundraising.
6. Care and welfare of students	• Students have a trusted member of staff to whom they can go with problems and receive advice. • The school has strong links with religious and community leaders, police, social workers and local NGOs and works with them to protect students, in and out of school and when carrying out domestic tasks.

	• The school records all incidents of bullying, violence and racial and sexual harassment, the action it has taken to deal with them and the eventual outcomes.
7. Access, equity and inclusion	• Both girls and boys have appropriate role models within the immediate community and can demonstrate the impact on their achievements. • The school identifies students affected by early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other conditions, orphans, those living in child-headed households and those with special needs, and supports their learning and care. • The school involves all students in educational and co-curricular activities, wherever possible.
8. Management of buildings and facilities	• The school has implemented a water conservation policy and its environment minimizes run off, wind erosion and deforestation. • The buildings and grounds are secure from intruders, and are well cared for and maintained. • The head teacher's office, staffroom and library are well organized and used for their intended purposes. • Science laboratories meet national safety requirements and provide safe storage for chemicals and equipment. • The school has a garden which provides a context for developing farming skills and supplies produce which is used to raise funds and/or improve students' nutrition

2.5.1. Management Standards

Here is a description of what is understood by the standards on management by different people and scholars.

Staff supervision

Supervision is the by overseeing of performance or operation of a person or group (Abubakar, 2018). It is the act of watching over the work or task of another person who lack full knowledge of the concept at hand, it does not mean the control of other but guidance in a work professionally. Supervision serves three primary purposes according to Abubakar, (2018), develop knowledge and skill, maintain quality and ethics and provides support to employees. Staff supervision requires that managers make sure that set standards by the ministry are being adhered to not only for achievement of institutional goals but national goals as well, so a manager makes sure that schools are kept running by observing teaching schedules, disciplinary actions, staff and teacher evaluation and making communications. In a school setting, staff supervision can fail or be ineffective if managers lack the authority and autonomy for their position. This can lead to disrespect and defiance from subordinates (Bradley and Ladany, 2001).

Staff development

This is a planned process of development which improves the quality of students learning by identifying, clarifying and meeting individual needs of the staff within the context of the institution as a whole (Abyu, 2019). Staff development is one of the main issues in an organization. The capacity of human beings to change the environment is mandatory so that real change is brought and an organization develops. It is therefore the duty of a manager to make sure that he or she has high quality competent staff who will have changed attitudes, beliefs and their classroom practices that will produce good learning outcomes of the students and this can be achieved by staff development (Gusky, 1986).

Staff deployment

The process of actively filling vacant positions using internal job postings and mechanisms of bringing workers on time in an open, equitable and cost efficient way (Mponda and Biwot, 2015). Employees are moved from one assignment to another to meet operational needs. A manager therefore need to be trusted to maintain high levels of performance from human resource by performing deployment practices which is one way of motivating employees and productivity increases (Mponda, et al., 2015).

Financial management

This is the area or function in an organization which is concerned with profitability, expenses, cash, credit, so that an organization may have the means to carry out its objectives as satisfactorily as possible. According to Subramanian and Paramasavian (2008), it is an integral part of overall management, it requires efficient use of an important economic resource namely “capital funds”. It is therefore an area of financial decision making which aims at harmonizing individual motives and enterprise goals. However in Malawian secondary schools managers fail to manage finances because funds they collect goes to account number one, and their budgets are predetermined by the ministry, as a lifeblood for business, money is required for fulfillment of institutional activities (Subramanian, et al., 2008) thus Malawian school managers might be limited in managing their finance and fulfilling requirements.

Partnership with parents and the community

The community refers to the immediate local environment rather than the national or global setting which have an impact on educational expectations and parents are adults responsible for the welfare of each student, (Male, T & Palaiologou, 2017). The relationship describes the partnership that exist between the community, parents and the school.

Care and welfare of students

Student's welfare and care encompasses of the services that promote the physical, mental and social wellbeing of students. These services help to advance the balanced growth and development of the young. It fosters a culture of caring and positive interaction in the school community.

Access equity and inclusion

This constitute of policies that facilitate equal and adequate opportunities to take advantage of education while removing any barriers that prevent equal participation including all people without focusing on their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, family income or any other differences.

Management of building facilities

School building and facility management is a practice of managing, taking care and maintaining all school owned buildings and assets (Laubach S, 2021).

Management of material resources

Material resources are basic components and assets that help to enhance teaching and understanding of concepts by students. They help students be comfortable in the teaching and learning environment and makes learners understand what is being taught (Osiji, 2021).

2.6. Potential Factors that Affect the Achievement of Effective Practices on Management

2.6.1. Management training

Management experts expresses various opinions regarding the meaning of training. Ivancevich, (2007) defined training as the need of skills and abilities for work to be done. Management training can be interpreted as an effort to form and develop, Horne and improve one's management abilities. If a leader is trained, she or he can be able to provide proper direction to move followers to achieve goals that can develop and improve schools. Through training, a school head can obtain a variety of management styles, practices and abilities that

could enhance their capabilities in carrying out their duties. Training related to theoretical and practical abilities helps a manager to handle changing management, (Winingsih and Sulistiono, 2020).

2.6.2. Work experience

Another potential factor that could affect management is work experience. In simple terms work experience is interpreted as the length of time someone worked both in years and the type of work a person is engaged in, (Winingsih, et al., 2020). It is argued that work experience can raise a person's potential because one is able to form the knowledge, skills, techniques and ways of carrying out a job (Johnson, 2007). In the context of a school headship, work experience is thought to influence the level of mastery of knowledge and skills in managing schools. Work experience could cast out doubt because the work becomes something that has been carried out before or the direction is already known. Hartini, (2012), Wirawan, Bagia and Susik (2016) also suggested a positive influence of work experience on competency of school managers which were also in agreement to Salsiva, Khristiana and Lians findings (2019).

2.6.3. Teaching background

A school head is a unique person in the school and the position cannot be handled by everyone. The head teachers knowledge and ability regarding management is not just enough. In order for the managerial role to work out with people under especially teachers, a manager is required to be a teacher or has been a teacher before (Bata, 2020). The scenario in Malawi is different from this ideology since headship is an appointment and there are no specifications, qualifications or minimum requirements for one to occupy the position. It is politically driven and this could influence the way head teachers manage schools (Hartini, 2012).

2.6.4. Organization Culture

Organizational culture is one of the most relevant components of an organization whether privately or publicly owned (Bata, 2020). This is the personality of an organization capable of guiding the thoughts and actions of its members at work. It is central to the beliefs, values and attitudes which are defined by the organization. People eventually get used to the norms and behaviors of an organization and this might positively or negatively affect the way management is performed.

Conclusion

The literature has revealed the meaning of the concepts of education centralization, management, National Education Standards, the implications of a centralized education system on management as well disclosed some of the possible factors that may affect effective practices of school managers.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to analyze how secondary schools are managed in a centralized system in fulfilling effective practices of the NES and this section discusses the research paradigm, the research approach and design, study setting, the research subjects and size, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, reliability and validity of information, trustworthiness, ethical consideration, data management, data analysis procedures that were used in order to successfully come up with information to fulfill the purpose, and how the information instituted might be disseminated.

3.1. Research paradigm

The research adopted the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivists believe in different multiple realities and that these realities are approached from different angles by different people (Rehman, 2016). The concept of interpretivism involves researchers interpreting elements of the study thus integrating human interests into a study. It brings a deep understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of treating populations as equal (Creswell, 2007). Correspondingly, Myers (2008), Saunders et al., (2012) and Bhattacharjee, (2012) agrees that interpretivism also aims at including richness in the insights gathered in research rather than generalizing variables and factors. The nature of this study required an in depth understanding of the experiences of head teachers in managing secondary schools while putting in mind the requirement to achieve the NES, hence the need for an interpretivism paradigm. The researcher therefore opted to go into the natural setting, the workplace of these managers to obtain primary source information on how they are doing. Although the paradigm has weaknesses the researcher still adopted it because data collected through interpretivism is associated with high levels of trustworthiness since it is collected primarily from the source and therefore it is honest and can be trusted (Gunawan, 2015).

3.2. Research approach and design

The study employed a qualitative research approach which pursued to understand the in-depth experiences of head teachers working in centralized education system from their own perspectives. Qualitative research provides a chance for researchers to get data from lived or felt experiences depending on how people make sense out of their lives (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Since the head teachers were approached in their natural setting/work place and data was collected in form of words to find out a better understanding of the problem from the very people involved, therefore qualitative approach was more suitable. The approach was also suitable because Context in qualitative research is never controlled or manipulated by the researcher, all the researcher did in this case was to interact extensively and intimately with participants during the study as put by (Mills and Gay, 2016). According to Creswell (2012), qualitative approaches also enables the researcher to obtain complicated details of a situation. These include feelings, thoughts and emotions that are difficult to extract or obtain through other, conventional research methods, such as social survey methods.

While using a qualitative approach the study also chose to work using a case study design. A case study is a detailed study of one or (at most) a few individuals or social units such as a classroom, school or neighborhood (Frankael, 2015). It can also be a study of an event, an activity or an ongoing process. Interviews with head teachers and deputy head teachers of different secondary schools were conducted hence making it a case of managers from different secondary schools. The study had multiple cases since more than one school was involved and according to Mills & Gay (2016) having a particular phenomenon or setting providing an understanding of a problem different to other settings qualifies to be an individual case.

3.3. Setting

The research was conducted in secondary schools found in SEED Zomba district. A city located in the southern region of Malawi, in the shire Highlands. The district has a very good background of education and has a lot of secondary schools than many districts, that did not limit the researcher from finding head teachers to work with. The consideration also came out because of resources for mobility and time for the study.

3.4. Sample Size

A sample is described as a group on which a researcher can obtain information (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2015). What is obtained can be applied to a larger group which has characteristics common to the sample. The sample size for this study was 20 participants comprised of 10 head teachers and 10 deputy head teachers from ten secondary schools who have worked for at least a year and are qualified for the post of head teachers, diploma level or above. The assumption is that qualified head and deputy head teachers have a better understanding of the education system and know their roles and policies that guide the education system in Malawi. This entails that the sample was purposively sampled.

The data for this study was collected during the month of April 2022. Ten schools were visited and labelled by numbers in descending order according to which one of them was visited first for easy identification. Interviews were conducted with school managers and documents that provided understanding to the study were checked. The data therefore constituted twenty interviews of two managers per school. An analysis of the biographical details of the participants provided some vast insights into the study findings. Below are tables of summary details of the participants of the study.

Here is the profile of participants:

Table2: Sex of participants

Sex	Number of participants
Male	14
Female	6
Total	20

Table3. Academic qualification of participants

Qualification	Number of participants
Diploma	5
Bachelor's Degree	12
Master's degree	3
Total	20

Table 4. Respondents' Professional experience

Years	Number of respondents
0-5	11
6-10	3
10-15	6
Total	20

3.5. Sampling techniques

Choosing or selecting a number of individuals from a population is referred to as sampling (Frankael, 2015). This can be done by using a number of techniques which include: using clusters, simple random sampling, convenience and stratified sampling just to mention a few, but for this study, the researcher used purposive-random sampling where a number of head teachers and deputy heads with required qualification were identified in different secondary schools. However, because of large numbers of secondary schools in the division, the schools were randomly selected to come up with a sample size of 20 participants. According to Frankael (2015) the sample was a homogenous sample since all the members possessed similar characteristics.

3.6. Data collection instruments and Methods

The researcher was aware that in order to resolve the research problem, there was need to consider the research questions as of prime importance. To effectively answer the research questions the researcher selected appropriate methods of data collection (Creswell, 2014). Data was collected using face-to- interviews and interview guides were used (See appendix1). An interview is a data collection method in which an interviewer (the researcher or someone working for the researcher) asks questions of an interviewee who provides data. Bryson, (2008) defined interviews as a conversation for gathering information. Interviews according to Bryson are categorized into four types, structured, semi structured, unstructured and focus group interviews. This being qualitative research, the researcher used semi-structured interviews because they are able to probe for in depth information in a systematic manner from participants. The interview contained open ended questions, this kind of interview is also called a depth interview because it collects in depth information about participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivation and feelings about a topic (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). The best part of an interview is that it allows the researcher to freely use probes to obtain clarity or additional information for example; repeating questions.

The researcher was aware of the weakness of interviews one of them being that, it leads to collection of huge amount of data which may not be related to the study, in order to overcome this the researcher made sure that focus was put to only specific phenomenon that helped in answering the research objectives. The collection tools used were interview guides (refer to appendix 1). An interview guide is a list of questions that a researcher plans to cover in an interview (Cresswell, 2007). More data was collected by checking documents and a document analysis checklist was used (see appendix2).

3.6.1. Data collection Matrix

The data collection matrix was to guide how data was to be collected directly answering the research objectives.

Research Objective	Data collection method	Justification
To investigate how managers describe the management system they are operating on and their understanding of the National Education Standards under management.	Interviews	Interviews helped the researcher to hear primarily from the Managers mouth which made it easy to articulate and judge their understanding from what they said, documents could not provide understanding
To analyze the implication of managing secondary schools in a centralized system in fulfilling effective practices of the NES under management	Both Interviews and Document analysis	Documents provided both voice, meaning and evidence. Documents removed the respondent's creativity in bringing expected responses.
To identify factors affecting the achievement of effective practices on NES under management	Interviews and Document Analysis	Documents helped in tracking trends of activities that could be due to the mentioned factors

3.7. Data Management Methods

Data management describes the organization, storage, preservation and sharing of data collected in a research project (Gay and Mills, 2016). The researcher was able to manage the data by consistently naming data files and conversations, dating all recordings and storing the recordings in different gadgets. It was transcribed and kept in soft copies and hard copies in case one gets lost or damaged. The researcher was aware that good data management helps to prevent errors, saves time and increases the quality for analyses.

3.8. Research Dissemination strategy

Borrell, (2016) defines data dissemination as spreading the findings or outputs of research to relevant audiences, this helps stakeholders to have access to results and conclusions that can help them make decisions. The findings from the research ought to be made known by putting the research report in Mzuzu University (MZUNI) library where it will be accessed electronically or manually, writing articles for publications and conference presentations, as well as publishing if resources are available.

3.9. Trustworthiness

Before going to the field, a pilot study was conducted before the main data was collected. Frankael, (2015) described a pilot study as a small-scale trial of the proposed procedures. This trial helped the researcher to detect any problems and they were remedied before the study was properly carried out. So after the pilot, the interview questions were adjusted and more were added because the researcher realized that one objective was not fully being answered. This is an assurance that the data that was collected yielded accurate and believable (Schutt, 2006).

The data collected was also triangulated by using a different source of data, so apart from the use of interviews the same information was checked in documents that are filed in the head teachers offices for example, circulation files which contain circular documents and policies that schools need to follow, the discipline file which keeps records of past discipline issues and how they were handled as well as the log book where serious offences are recorded among other documents.

Transcription of the data was done word by word “verbatim” as advised by Creswell (2014). A file of all written transcripts by each participant was created and shared with the researcher’s supervisor. See appendix 3

Lastly, member checking was done to ensure validity of the data, the researcher went back to the participants after data collection to confirm recorded data versus was said during interviews. The only challenge that was encountered was time, other schools were far that the researcher could not manage to return for member checking so checking was done after the interviews on the same day. Just to confirm the data as well, the researcher had a recorder which was used to record the interviews so that the recordings could also verify what was said and written down during interviews.

Before the data collection even began, the researcher made sure that the objectives were well planned and the researcher prepared for the interview thoroughly. The recording gadget was tested to prevent failures and disruptions during the interviews. The researcher was well conversant about the topic and ready to answer any questions from participants, physically and mentally ready to conduct the interviews.

3.9. Ethics

The researcher sought ethical clearance from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC). A consent letter to collect data was given by the university (see appendix 4). Permission was also sought from the Education Division office before going to schools (Appendix 5) and permission was granted, the researcher was given a permission letter to go ahead with data collection (Appendix 6). The head teachers were asked for consent before

involving them (see appendix7). Alfin, (2018) emphasized the need of getting informed consent and voluntary research participation of participants, Alfin utters that participants should be adequately informed about a research and should be allowed to have the power and freedom to decide whether to participate or decline. This is also in agreement with Cohen et al., (2011) who emphasizes that access and acceptance are vital aspects of data collection. Knowing this, the participants were well informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any given time of their choice. Respondents were assured of confidentiality of the data; no names and identity of participants were to be revealed anywhere.

Also, taking into consideration that we are living in the world that is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher made sure that all preventive measures set by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health Malawi were being adhered to. All participants were provided with hand sanitizers before handling any tool and face masks were given to be used during interviews and any other meetings. This made sure that participants were protected and the spread of the virus was minimized. (Check appendix 8)

Finally, the researcher did not forget to perform formal exit procedures after the process of data collection was completed (Frost, 2011; Ndengu, 2012; Terell, 2012).

4.0. Data analysis techniques

Data collected was transcribed word by word by listening to recorded audios. The transcripts were later crosschecked with field notes from the interviews, then the data was coded guided by research objectives without moving out of the guiding conceptual framework. Coding is the process of grouping evidence and labelling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspective. (Creswell and Clark, 2007). The codes were then grouped into themes that could be easily interpreted. The software packages that were used in analyzing the data were NVivo and ATLAS.ti. The two complement each other in a way that they have some minor differences which are all very useful in analyzing qualitative data. NVivo is a software that helps researchers organize and analyze non-numerical data or unstructured data. The software allows users to classify, sort, and arrange information, examine the relationship in the data and combine analysis, linking, shaping and modelling. The researcher also combined

Nvivo with ATLAS.ti which is a tool that manages documents. It is a multi-document view which can help in viewing data transcribed with NVivo. ATLAS.ti has a high performance multimedia engine, intuitive area coding for all data types, ATLAS.ti uncovers and systematically, analyzes complex phenomena hidden in unstructured data just like the one in this study which was in form of texts, multimedia or geospatial (Freitas F. et al, 2017).

Not only did the researcher depend on the software's rather data was also analyzed manually by the researcher because the researcher was the interpreter of the findings (Lofgren, 2013). After data was transcribed word by word, Coding was done guided by research objectives, and also making sure that the study remained bounded by the conceptual framework. During this process the researcher explored more literature, came up with interesting issues, repetitive issues mentioned by respondents which led to coding and the codes were grouped into various groups which formed sub-themes. The sub-themes were regrouped to form themes. The study came up with themes that were deducted from the conceptual framework and new themes that emerged from the respondents. The deducted and generated themes were the basis of arguments in the discussions and conclusions drawn.

Conclusion

The chapter has described the methodologies used by the researcher before data was collected, during data collection and how the data was managed and interpreted.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results, interpretation and discussion of the findings. The study was set to investigate secondary school managers' experience of managing schools in a centralized system. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To investigate how managers describe the management system they are operating on and their understanding of the NES.
2. To analyze the implication of managing secondary schools in a centralized system in fulfilling effective practices of the NES under management.
3. To identify factors affecting the achievement of effective practices on NES under management.

According to Cohen et al, (2007) data can be presented in five different ways, firstly by using data collection instruments, or by individual participants, groups of people, by issues, sometimes by research questions/objectives. This study will present its findings by its objectives because this approach draws together all relevant data for exact issues of concern to the researcher, it helps to provide information in a more coherent manner irrespective of the methods used when collecting data and without looking at who provided the information. Also, it makes sure that the researcher returns to driving concerns of the research therefore answering the research questions that arose at the early stages of research. Indeed, it is not in the interest of the researcher to bring these cases as individuals or separate entities but to look at issues across multiple cases hence the choice of going objective by objective. Findings under each objective will be presented and discussed before proceeding to the next objective.

4.2 Findings and discussion

4.2.1 Secondary School managers understanding of the National Education Standards (NES) and Description of the management System

This objective aimed at finding out secondary school managers understanding of the management system they follow when managing secondary schools as well as checking their understanding of the NES. Data for this objective came from interviews. The findings on school management system will be presented first and discussed before findings on NES.

4.2.1.1 School managers' understanding of school management system being used

Literature describes a centralized education system in different ways but this study has adopted one that says a central planning administration is one where by the state acts as the sole provider, controller and regulator of education (Marume & Jubenkanda, 2016, Yezo, 2013, & Yazdi, 2013). Key concepts in this description are that the government makes decisions, controls all aspects of education, decides what resources to be used and assumes the needs for students and the community. In analyzing data obtained for objective one, key concepts from description of a centralized education system and the conceptual framework for the study were considered in coming with predetermined themes. These were: single point concentration of power, hierarchical top bottom directives, Meticulous record keeping used for inspection, strict rules and regulations, determined division of labor and job descriptions of employees. Using themes, here is what the study found.

Single point concentration of power

The participants described the system that they work in as one that gives managerial powers and responsibilities related to education in one hand, or making it as a central authoritative role. More than ten participants described the system as mostly of this kind, they said that they work under policies which are formulated by the government and all they have to do is implement them. Decision making process resides in the hands of a few people within the organization. This is what some of them had to say:

‘Everything is done by the ministry, they send us teachers, learners and provides us with money to run the schools it also controls all the monitoring and inspection, they come and inspect our schools when they want, without proper communication and they rate us based on the NES and curriculum that all schools follow in Malawi despite having different type of students and without considering the context and location of schools, the monitoring that happens at school level does not even count and sometimes it is demotivating and we stop doing them’ DP10

Another responded and added on the issue of finances, money is controlled by central government and not by local governments, he said:

‘There have been attempts to decentralize the system but I can say it has failed because right now we still receive our funds from the central government while our friends in primary school their funds comes from the local government’ HT6.

Also, ‘In some years they give us money and tell us what to do with it. The government controls the activities of the school’ HT 8

It was revealed that centralization is even practiced at school level because the head teacher is taken as the center of everything, during the interviews deputy head teachers explained that they fail to act upon some issues because the head teacher has to approve first, for example a deputy head teacher cannot suspend a learner without the heads recommendations and approval despite deputy being the chair of the discipline committee. In their opinion, if one is given a job to do, the one giving the job need to trust that the people given the job are capable and they should be allowed to do their job. This over dependence on head teachers was also shown when the deputy head teachers were asked if they have copies of policies in their office and they responded by saying:

“zimenezu koma ahead, go and ask the head teacher’ Meaning “those are for the Head teacher, go and ask the head teacher’. DP1

“Mm no we just see some of them pasted in the head teachers office but we are never told what they mean and what is required of us” DP7

The findings of this study talks to the findings of a study by Sancar, (2012) conducted in North Cyprus which revealed teachers perceptions of school managers in centralized education system. Teachers described managers in a centralized system as initiators who are expected to be the first in shaping schools and others follow, a typical example of instructional leadership and centralization.

The same way, managers in bureaucracy are taken as the ones in control of the system of education, completely the power and abilities to perform different duties is vested in them.

Hierarchical top bottom directives

The respondents called the directives and instructions from above as mandates.

“We are simply mandated to do what we are told, we are told everything is policy’, ‘so do you question a policy? No you don’t” said DP5.

It was interesting to hear from one manager who figuratively described working in the education sector as working as a bodyguard. You do not question the system, you simply do the work that you are hired for. In his words he said.

*“We are simply taken out of the classroom, brought to the office to implement policies that’s all we know.” “Working as a manager at school is simply working as a board guard for a King who even when you see a cockroach in food you always shut down because that is none of your business.”*DP5

Seven of the schools visited reported to follow this type of management. Top bottom management is not a new thing in the academic circles, studies have been conducted to rethink on this approach, Martinichi, (2016) study found out that this approach’s practical advantage of the management team lies on control, it is relatively easy to evaluate whether plans have been fulfilled or not because the processes and work are well known. On the other hand the same study also came out with rather different views from participants who said the approach can be ambiguous for the manager whom is supposed to think through all details of a project and thus advocating for a balanced top-down, down-top approach.

Meticulous record keeping used for inspection

It has proved to be a culture of record keeping of most schools through the findings of the study. Managers said that it is their duty to make sure that teachers are keeping important records and they have files used to keep information for future reference, for example; the keeping of discipline files for both teachers and learners. Records are a part of the teaching profession identity.

“Updating of school records, it is part of our job” DP2

In preparation for classes teachers make sure that they make plans for their lessons, in reference to the syllabi. They scheme their work for the entire academic year and make sure that it is followed to guide teaching. In the same way, school managers are required to keep records of staff members, students, policy documents and plans of school activities. This came to be another description of the system that school managers revealed to have been using when interviewed.

In relation to the Beauracritic theory which is a part of the conceptual framework guiding the study, keeping of records in the education sector helps in checking performance and they are used in conducting promotions and appraisals, it shows competence and availability of ones records during inspection helps inspectors to check the consistency of what a person is capable of doing.

In the process of decentralization of education management in Southern Asia, keeping of records was carried over from centralization because it was seen as one of the important aspects of strategic education planning and improvement (Southern Asian Ministry of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology, 2012).

Strict rules and regulations

The study revealed that the schools that were visited follow strict rules and regulations. They had copies of school rules and one of the rules they follow is that all students should reach school in time. To make sure that this is achieved some schools proved to have punctuality books where students indicate the time they reach school when they are late, the same applied to teachers. Schools make sure that students are wearing the right uniform and abide to general set rules and regulations set by the schools. It is also believed that everything that the students must do in school is to be written down by the administration, this proved to be right because most schools displayed school rules on their notice boards and had copies of school rules signed by all students kept in files by the managers in their office.

In Malawi, being a student does not provide an excuse for one to disobey rules of the public, even the unawareness of the law does not provide an excuse for not being charged a crime, therefore schools make sure that all rule are being followed, misconducts may lead to students losing their place in school or other kind of punishments. In centralized education systems, it is believed that academic excellence of students is mainly brought about by respect and obedience to the rules and regulations which are established by the school.

The way the managers described the system is ironically the right way of describing the centralized system according to Acher and Siyakile, (2017). As illustrated by Archer, (2017) a centralized curriculum is the one with uniform mode of certifying learners, all textbooks which would be used in the schools are checked by the Ministry of education through the curriculum and there is compliance to the national syllabus. The certification process is determined and controlled at national level. This is also the case with Ghana and other countries in the sub-Saharan region as Zimbabwe and Malawi (Archer, 2017).

Having managers describe the secondary education system in Malawi as in the above themes still articulates that the system is centralized. By implying to what Siyakile (2011) found in Zambia, there is no ideal version of proper decentralization despite other things done at school level because implementation of official policies remain blueprints of what is supposed to be done. Policies are defined as influencers of the field of education, they are a collection of rules and laws that govern the education system and therefore they are there to be followed as long as one works under the guidance and legislation of the government.

Joined forces Approach

On the above point, a few managers had a different perception of the system, they reported that they sometimes are able to make their own decisions at school level and that implies decentralization. They do not solely depend on a single approach but the systems are mutually used. One of them said:

“Teachers also bring in their initiatives as long as they are helping to bring better results. Some teachers are also gifted and have their own skills which we allow them to bring on board” he continued to say, *“there are other decisions that as a school we are able to make on our own but there are other things that we have to take orders from above”* HT9

The system might be partially decentralized but according to what came out of the managers understandings, it shows that the managers themselves somehow are the ones that makes the system more centralized because they limit themselves to a certain chunk, they think that something's are not their responsibility but rather the responsibility of the higher offices like the division and Ministry of Education (MOE), that refrain them from being independent and acting on some issues on their own.

School managers' understanding of National Education Standards under Management

The management standards focus on the roles of school managers and the practical actions schools take to ensure that students have a positive school experience. These include: Partnership with parents and the community, staff supervision and management, access, equity and inclusion, management of buildings and facilities as well as material resources and financial management.

When the school managers were asked to explain their understanding of the NES under management, only one third (7 out of 20) were able to describe the standards. They expressed their sentiments in various ways, but most of them focused on the general concept of the national education standards as a whole. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the participants' understanding of the NES under management as they responded to what is required of them to achieve the effective practice Level on National Education Standards under management.

Table 4.1: School managers' understanding of Effective Practice Level for NES under management

Participants code	Responses
HT1	I know them just in general not specific for management
HT6	We are Required to take care of a number of issues on how the schools should be run.
HT3	As a manager the NES requires me to use it as a guide in running the school, it helps us assess how we are performing These are like guidelines in which schools are supposed to operate on. They are expected set limits whereby schools should operate within those guidelines, they assist the schools to make sure that they perform.”

HT5	It a measure of education in Malawi whereby schools have to follow
DP6	I think we are supposed to care for the students and make sure that they are well behaved, check schemes of work and conduct meetings with head of departments
HT2	YES I heard. Of course what I heard is that they help us to measure our performance, they are on how we can achieve success in our schools, how we can improve, mmm even our infrastructure, how to deal with our teachers cooperation, but mmm just on management am not sure.
DP4	As a manager, my major role is to supervise the implementation and delivery of the curriculum, I do this by checking how teaching and learning is taking place and we record on supervision forms since everything we do requires evidence

Out of eight National Education standards under school management, only three were repeatedly mentioned by the school managers interviewed. Firstly, all the 20 participants agreed to have heard about the NES but when they were asked to explain what the NES on management are, they could only give a general description of the whole policy document and not specifically the NES on management as some extracts indicate in the table above. Some of them gave meaning of the NES and its aims, but could not specifically explain what they are required to do as managers to realize the effective practices under management. Out of the many responses, the researcher was able to come up with themes that described the NES under management, this was made possible

by thematic analysis which allows researchers to make sense of large amounts of information so that important responses to research emerge, and these were:

Supervision of staff

A smaller number of the participants were able to know that under management they need to develop and supervise staff, staff supervision is one of the most important supports for educational system and education professional development (Ismail, 2018). Supervision enhances innovations among educators and initiates important changes that embraces industrial revolution. In the education sector it is a way of checking the need for skill development and an integral part of education management.

Supervision is one of a common feature of education policies in many developing countries, globally education is positioned as a socially progressive phenomenon that promotes economic growth and productivity (Rowell, 2020), as such education policies becomes inevitably bound to development for example, there is Teacher Evaluation System Policy in Mexico which aims at building highly skilled professional educators (Mancera and Schmelkes, 2010).

However, according to a study by Ahmad and Saefurrohman (2020) conducted in Indonesia, it was found that supervision is not always effective when it is not managed properly, it has to start from planning, implementation, follow-up and feedback activities of which in most cases some of these activities are skipped.

Building good relationships with students and parents

In addition to supervision, HT4 also mentioned the role of ‘*building good relationships with the students and the community*’ as managers they make sure that there are support groups for students for example the student’s council and Parents Teachers Association (PTA). The managers makes sure that the community develop ownership spirit and makes sure that the school is well taken care of. In their remarks the managers mentioned that;

“The student’s body and class monitors act as a link between teachers and students their parents are in the PTA committee and they are the ones helping us in paying for other support staff for example the assistant librarian” HT4

Another manager also said that one of the things that help their school to perform better is the fact that their relationship with learner's and parents is very good:

“We have a good relationship with the PTA which assist the school in many areas. They give awards to motivate teachers, as well as providing resources to support staff and our staff works hard.

Management of finances

School managers were also quick to mention the role of managing finances which from most of them came as a complaint that the government does not allow them the freedom to full hold of finances that help in smooth running of school activities. Rendering to Mazin & Ibrahim (2017), the art of education management dwells on getting work done within a given budget. They handle salaries of support staff, maintain school buildings and equipment, purchase teaching and learning materials for example lab equipment which all come back to the need for a manager to know and practice financial management.

The above roles are in line with NES 19 and 20 which are under management (NES, 2015). It was interesting to note that the document has been in schools for some time but out of the 20 participants only three were confident to mention standards under management though without proper phrasing, the rest struggled to mention them which indicates lack of familiarity, one wonders then if they are not familiar with these standards how are they performing their roles as managers and how will they make sure that these are being practiced? These are questions for future studies but according to this study, it has been noted that there is lack of understanding of the NES. The researcher feels it could be nice to know from the ministry of education if they are aware that the managers in secondary schools lack understanding of the NES. Sometimes they run to the excuse of forgetfulness but that only shows that they do not know and they fail to express what they know. Managers have shown that they do not know what they are supposed to do for effective school management nor do they understand the document that guide them.

The study showed that managers only know a few of the different eight standards that are under management. The only standards that came out clear were financial management, supervision and partnership with the community. The findings of the study concur with the findings of another study conducted in Malawian private secondary schools by Mbewe, et al. (2021). According to

Mbewe, private school teachers and managers lacked knowledge of the Special Needs Education Policy Guidelines.

Lack of knowledge of policy indicates that policies cannot yield its effective purposes. The same was true with policies like the teacher-pupil ratio policy in Malawi, it was set but did not become the practice as it was the wish of MoEST (Wolf et, al., 1999).

4.2.2. Implication of managing secondary schools in a centralized system in fulfilling effective practices of the NES under management.

Any type of Education system has implications on school management which may either be positive or negative. This section presents and discusses implications of education system on management of the schools according to the schools managers who participated in this study. Eight thematic areas were mentioned.

4.2.2.1. Minimizes interaction between schools and the community

In the new paradigm, schools and the wider community coexist, there is need for openness to external needs of the community, the willingness of schools to adapt to the needs is vital. The findings of the study found out that this is hindered in the system that is in practice, here is what managers said:

“The community think that learners become the responsibility of teachers and head teachers the moment they leave home, they do not care what happens at school and they do not care to follow up” HT3 reported.

He added to say,

“mostly we display information only for students, for the community we don’t, this is because the community we are in has no interest in the affairs of the school, sometimes it behaves like they don’t want the school, we have a challenge with the community, the school came as an island, a stranger, it looks like the school was imposed on them.”

Another participant also had to say the following about the community and guardians

“We work with a community that does not know the roles of a manager, so when a leader is trying to impose sanctions of leadership like what the policies say, people tend to resist. This includes the parents, we do not work as partners but enemies.” DP9

Furthermore Head teacher 5 added by saying

“As head teachers we are not spokespersons for the government so displaying information for the community without getting consent from the top bosses is a violation of our profession, otherwise we only give out information when we allowed to by the division manager. Of course the standards requires us to do so e.g. displaying information on finances but we feel for security reasons it might attract the attention of thieves .HT5

The above statements are an indication of how the relationship between parents and managers is like in our secondary schools. The schools feel it is a waste of time to call for parental meetings because most parents are not interested to attend, they do not display information for access to the community because nobody will come and see and sometimes the management feels it is not the community’s concern to know the activities of the school. It was also revealed from the minutes of meetings that schools conduct with PTA meetings once in a while and the participation of parents in such meetings is underrepresented.

This might be attributed to the fact that centralization limits lateral relations as put by Herman (2018). The concentration of authority to the school managers weakens the vertical relationships. People end up feeling like a waste of time to take part in issues where their ideas will not be taken on board in the end. This however might bring ineffectiveness in schools since school programs are not simply forced on schools but requires mutual interaction with all stakeholders (Khan, et al. 2020).

4.2.2.2. Delayed decision making due to top bottom approach

The processes of making decisions have shown to have a longer thread to follow. For example taking the issue of discipline procedures this is what the respondents said:

“We call for the discipline committee to hear and ask them to write reports. If it is a teacher, we call for discipline and write a report to the division together with charge sheets and suspension

letter, at the division they also meet as a discipline committee, if the decision is made they write us to notify us of the divisions decision” DH6

Not only had the above respondent had that to say that but also:

“Students are disciplined by the discipline committee. If their cases require internal punishment we punish them but if the offense is big we charge the student with a case and submit it to the division which upholds a decision or send the case to the ministry and wait for their decision. The problem with this process is that we do not get immediate response from the division”. HT8

In accord to the above, below is also an explanation from another manager:

“Issues are handled according to the procedure. when it gets out of hand we refer to the division, though sometimes we might refer a case and they give their own views contrary to ours, they behave as if they know more on the ground than those that are actually on the ground and that is a challenge. It also takes long for them to respond and the sad part is that as heads, we give them direction but they come up with their own decisions as if they are on the ground that becomes painful. As of now, we just got used to the nature of our system, they do things slowly and the way they want it. That affects us as managers because we remain with the problem which keeps on disturbing us and affects our operations”

The theories guiding the study described very well how education centralization makes sure that managerial decisions are made through a rational process. The structural theory for example, talks about an organization having 5 levels which are supposed to be orderly followed when making decisions (Bush, 2020). This is evident in the guidelines by MoEST (2014) now MOE in handling discipline issues which also advocates for a similar procedure. MoEST recommended that first of all, the offender must be summoned and given a charge sheet where they are charged against the offense they have committed, then the offender should be asked to write a report in front of a witness which is signed by the offender and the witness, thereafter the case is taken to the discipline committee, recommendations are made by the committee which should be submitted to the head teacher who also makes his/her recommendations to MoEST with a copy to the division office. The process also applies to discipline issues of teachers.

In support to the framework and the guidelines outlined by Ministry of Education Science and technology, the respondents to the study were speaking the same language with the above

sentiments. They also revealed that discipline issues follow a process to handle and does not require a day or two.

Bush, (2013) agrees that in decentralized education systems, decision making is fast since decisions are taken within the school and nonpolitical decisions are made. Any kind of problem can be acknowledged and solved immediately without the understanding by authorities in the Centre to be necessary.

4.2.2.3. *Strict compliance to job description hinders flexibility*

Despite the school managers being qualified and having a job to do, the study reevaluated that managers do not fully exercise their duties in this system of education. To them the system brings in a hindrance, here is what they had to say:

*“Centralized system also compromises with how we work, we are directed by the policies, as a manager we cannot just impose our own policies for example in the rural areas you see that a lot of students do not go further with education because there is limited space at secondary schools for example, we are told that in each class there should be 50 students from five of our feeder schools, some students pass but cannot be enrolled according to proportion needed. Feeder schools are many. If managers were given chance to allow more intake in schools where there they feel like there is still more space at least a good number of children would come to secondary school. Managers should be given opportunity to make decisions such as such to ease access in a decentralized way.”*HT1

To show his infringement by the system HT9 also shared his experience by saying that;

“The system is like this because they want schools to be run politically, for example if I am to send these students on government bursary who have not paid fees home I will be cautioned to say that I am maybe a cadet wanting to make the government look bad and embarrass it, so our hands are tied. We cannot exercise our managerial roles. On the other hand if these students are to demonstrate one day because they don't have water or food, the very same people will say that we are incompetent.”

The participants of the study were all well qualified and about 9 of them have been in their positions for more than 6years making them more experienced. Experience has shown to play a

part in how better a manager can be, experience can raise a person's potential in terms of skills knowledge, techniques and the way they carry out certain jobs (Hartini, 2012). But regardless of this, it has shown through the findings that managers are not trusted to make good judgments, instead they refer most of their cases to the central office. Not only that the handling of finances, hiring and transfer of teachers and students also remain the duty of the higher office and not the school management. Their job description limits them to performing such duties.

It is a well-known fact that when someone is chosen to be a manager of an institution there are many factors that are taken into consideration that makes that person better for the role. They are chosen from their different qualities and abilities and they are given a job description to perform their job. In Some countries for example England, qualities of a good school manager has received a strong policy emphasis, it is believed to be one reason that helps schools improve as well as raising standards of education, (Education Development Trust, 2017).

4.2.2.4. *Financial instability*

The National Education standards listed effective practices for financial management. Under these practices, audits without queries, letting the community count for the finances and having a history of financial stability are what accounts for well managed finances (NES, 2015). Schooling resources that cost money matter and more equitable distribution of funding at a school can improve outcomes that's why financial management and availability of money to run schools become something to include in making sure that schools perform according to standards. The respondents of the research kept mentioning that they have problems with financial management since there is instability in the flow of money in schools. Managers revealed that they depend much on the funding that comes from government in running schools. As for boarding schools they receive a little top up from the learners boarding fees though they say it is still not enough. Unfortunately, these finances are controlled by the headquarters and it becomes very hard for head teachers to follow up when they receive little funding or no funding all for a whole academic year.

As one of the reasons schools fail to reach effective practices on management, finances cannot be left out, the following arguments evolved on this:

“We fail to work because of Lack of finances, all along we have been depending on ORT for a lot of things e.g. conducting in-service trainings, and since July 2021 we haven't received any money.

So what we do is to divert money meant for example food here in boarding schools and we pay electricity.” money to buy supplementary reading materials and buy chalk”HT9

Another participant also said that:

“We Lack of adequate finances so that we can procure required materials and hire human resource for example support staff” HT2

Not only these;

“Finances are not enough, Infrastructure is not enough, we do not have enough teachers and with little funding we do not conduct CPDs. We even lack of resources e.g. paper to produce exams, we are not receiving enough funding from the government” said another manager.

As if that is not enough, another participant narrated that:

“We cannot award our students and teachers because we do not have resources, we prioritize other important things and leave others though we understand that both are equally important in helping fulfilling the standards” HT8

“this is year is even worse, we have been expecting money from the government for learners that are on government bursary but we have not received yet, we are keeping these children in school and am assuring you that they have been using resources for their friends the whole academic year, it is not easy on us” HT3

The researcher tried to probe more by asking the manager to provide evidence to what they were saying and was kind enough to provide a list of names of learners with their fees balances. Below is a picture of one of the sheet of papers that contained the names.

Form 2C			NAME TERM 1			FEES BALANCE	
2022 Term 1 & Term 2 Balances						Term 1	Term 2
NAME	Term 1	Term 2					
1. Chithenge Stephen	K62,000	K62,000	1	Anderson Amidu		K30,000	K62,000
2. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	2	[REDACTED]		K62,000	K62,000
3. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	3	[REDACTED]		K35,000	30,000
4. [REDACTED]	K27,000	K62,000	4	[REDACTED]		K17,000	K62,000
5. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	5	[REDACTED]		K62,000	K62,000
6. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	6	[REDACTED]		K5,000	K62,000
7. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	7	[REDACTED]		K1,000	K62,000
8. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	8	[REDACTED]		K62,000	K62,000
9. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	9	[REDACTED]		K62,000	K62,000
10. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	10	[REDACTED]		K51,000	K62,000
11. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	11	[REDACTED]		K42,000	K62,000
12. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	12	[REDACTED]		K37,000	K62,000
13. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	13	[REDACTED]		Paid	K7,000
14. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	14	[REDACTED]		K62,000	K62,000
15. [REDACTED]	K62,000	K62,000	15	[REDACTED]		K62,000	K62,000

Figure 4.1 Fees Balances for the learners in both first and second terms.

Just similar to the above case which was a boarding secondary school another respondent from another boarding school complained and said:

“From July 2020- March 2021 we only saw figures of how much we were supposed to get from government but that money did not come, now we only source from the fees that the students are paying, It is worse here in boarding schools because having more than 500 students and feed them 3 meals a day, pay for their utilities for a term is not a joke”

Schooling resources that cost money matter and more equitable distribution of funding at a school can improve outcomes, which is why financial management and availability of money to run schools become something to contemplate in making sure that schools perform according to standards.

The respondents of the research kept mentioning that they have problems with financial management since there is instability in the flow of money in schools. Managers revealed that they depend much on the funding that comes from government in running schools. As for boarding schools they receive a little top up from the learners boarding fees though they say it is still not enough. Unfortunately, these finances are controlled by the headquarters and it becomes very hard for head teachers to follow up when they receive little funding or no funding all for a whole academic year.

The same was noticed in a study in North Cyprus where school managers complained that in a centralized education system they failed to manage their school budget, except from handling a small amounts of money that was sometimes provided by parent’s union. This is exactly the case with Malawian secondary schools because the study revealed that schools are heavily depending on development fund from students. The situation is frustrating for some managers who said that they end up feeling worthless and ineffective.

However, there are also other studies that argues that centralization can be beneficial for financial management (Theodore, 2004). This is said to be the case since managers in a centralized system have less pressure and less workload so they are more keen and careful in evaluating and handling finances.

4.2.2.5. Delays encourages indiscipline

Discipline in schools can be defined as respect for school rules and regulations and the maintenance of an established standard of behavior which implies self-control, restraint, respect for oneself and others (Idu and Olugbache, 2011). A behavior contrary to the above now becomes indiscipline. The study's findings found out that the delays in solving discipline matters in secondary schools encourages indiscipline. Some managers had to say:

*"Sometimes the division takes too long to sit down and report to the ministry. For example last year we had a case whereby a student beat up a deaf child and we recommended for indefinite suspension but nothing was done until the time for exams reached and that child came and wrote the exams. These kind of cases sends a bad picture to students because they think that whatever they can do the management can have nothing to do about it."*HT4

Disciplinary matters of teachers are even worse to handle as the participant below had to put it:

"For teachers it is a bit difficult because they tell us point blank that we did not employ them, we still take them to discipline, if they don't change we report them to the division the problem comes when the division does not act up on it." DH3

The problem of indiscipline in schools has persisted over the years. There is no doubt that students indiscipline generally militates against effective teaching and learning and the production of useful members of the society. This behavior brings frustration and lack of motivation to teachers. The government sometimes contribute to indiscipline by not providing adequate facilities and resources in schools (Idu et al., 2011). Not only that, lack of proper punishments and negligence on discipline matters brings in a tendency of indiscipline and no respect for authority.

In agreement to the above literature the participants of the study as well said that it is because of the leniency of the division and the ministry in responding to critical cases of indiscipline that these cases are rising in the schools. It is worth noting that indiscipline also happens in teachers and a school managers in some cases.

4.2.2.6. *Shortage of staff and support staff*

Teacher deployment remain the duty of the Ministry of education, a lot of graduates lately have been finishing school but the ministry has failed to send them in schools but schools remain understaffed. Managers try to report shortages to the division offices which also wait upon receiving new recruits that are sent to schools. It also happens that even after receiving teachers schools might receive teachers that they did not ask for and the shortage still remain.

The findings also unveiled that schools are even failing to employ support staff for example library assistants. Most of the people working in School libraries are teachers that are simply asked to assist despite having to do their job as teachers.

“Yes we have a library, but no library assistant we use teacher librarians because we can afford to hire a librarian.”(HT1)

Another respondent also said:

“Yes we have a library but no library assistant because that would raise our wage bill. We use library teachers who in many times they are busy with teaching. As a result we do not open full time” (HT10)

The NES requirements on teacher deployment and development is that managers should be able to deploy staff within the school in line with their training, experience and skill but this is contrary to what happens on the ground taking it from the findings of the study.

A study by Emma Garcia and Elaine Weins (2019) in the United States also found that schools have shortages of staff but school managers fail to deploy the needed staff because in public education systems this becomes the responsibility of the government. This proved to have a negative impact on student’s ability to learn because the available teacher’s effectiveness is threatened and the quality of education delivered is not paramount.

In many developed countries however research has found out that teacher shortages are addressed by school principals who are given the power to prepare and conduct continually development courses and programs which include hiring and firing of teachers (Sutcher & Padolsky 2017,

Espinoza, 2017, Kini, Bishops, & Darling Hammond, 2016). The programs also improve principals ability to include teachers in decision making which fosters positive school culture and creates good learning and working environments. These studies pointed to several key features of effective principals in addressing staff shortages such as:

- Close collaboration between schools and districts that help in teacher development and deployment
- Principals should be able equipped with skills to seek funding that can be allocated to employing staff
- states should consider providing funding for principals to receive preparation and professional development including school management courses or programs

So the study concluded that school managers play a crucial role in building a stable and strong teacher workforce when given power to do so.

A lot of the implications of the system dwelled on the negative side however other findings of the study ascertained to the goodness of the centralized education system as participants mentioned the points as being a result of using the centralized path.

4.2.2.7 Job Security for employees

For teachers working in government, it takes multiple offences for one to lose his or her Job because of the process that leads to dismissal. It was also evident during data collection that the researcher did not find any documents that could show evidence of dismissal of teachers in the schools discipline files. All that was found were warning letters and minutes for disciplinary hearings.

“To me waiting for the ministry to act is normal because we are not the ones who employed the teachers or selected the students. It is the policy we follow so it is okay.” (DH2)

Another responded added that:

“To me waiting for the ministry to act is normal because we are not the ones who employed the teachers or selected the students. It is the policy we follow so it is okay.” DH6

The above statement implies that teachers remain on their job while waiting for the disciplinary procedures by the ministry of education and still enjoy the benefits of civil service which should not happen in private institutions.

4.2.2.8 Encourages order/ Hierarchical predictable system

Order in the sense that there are no shortcuts. Subsequently everything follows proper procedure and takes enough time to find evidence to issues that need evidence as well as gaining insights from others who have had a chance to pass through the same experience.

So as the below respondents are in support:

“Centralization is good because it gives chance for the students to remain in school, because as a manager we have to put ourselves in the shoes of the learners”. HT1

“In some cases this is good because it prevents personal matters affecting professionalism” HT9

All these help people in the system to avoid making fast irresponsible decisions that require processing, it helps learners to stay in school making sure that the issue of equity and access is not being compromised.

4.2.3. Factors affecting the achievement of effective practices on NES under management.

Data for this objective was collected through interviews and document analysis. When asked to brainstorm potential factors that may hinder school managers to fulfil the NES under management, a lot of issues emerged, amongst them the following came out strong and frequently.

4.2.3.1. Knowledge gap

The study found that lack of information in policies affect how managers understand and influence others to work towards achieving goals of the school. Schools reported that they could not fulfil the effective practices of the NES because they did not have the knowledge of the NES and its requirements.

Firstly, it was reported that NES came as a surprise for the head teachers. Managers reported that they were not consulted on the development of the standards but only received a call from MoEST that every school must operate under the set standards. One of the participants said:

They don't involve enough teachers in making and amending policies for example the covid 19 time we were imposed on how to handle the students for example the number required in a class while we have no enough structures” DP3

UNESCO (2020) report wrote that it is in the plans of MOEST to include consultations and involve education stakeholders but during a meeting conducted with teachers in 2020, it was revealed that this does not happen, and most teachers have never been involved in policy formulation. Teachers in Malawi said they wished there was a social dialogue between them and MOEST. In the report, teachers informed UNESCO that the relationship that exist between teachers and MoEST is less confrontational than dialogue oriented. This concurs to the findings of the study. The suggested platforms for dialogue were through media and through Teachers Union.

Not only in Malawi but also in countries like the United States, since the dawn of public education there has been failure in acknowledging the expertise of school managers and teachers in deciding and implementing policies for education that is according to Crawford (2016). In Canada at least, teachers are being recognized as sources of important information for purposes of assessing and improving education (Olson, 2002).

Secondly. There was no training or orientation on NES. Out of 20 respondents, most of the respondents mentioned that one of the factors that hinder the fulfilment of the NES is due to lack of proper orientation and training. HT4 supposed that:

“We are not oriented on being managers we are just chosen to be in the offices and we don't know what management is about so we perform not as expected because we don't know” HT4.

On the same issue of training another participant also said that:

“The NES was introduced to us in a very short period of time that we did not even understand it, but we were expected to teach teachers in the schools.” DP6

The managers complained that problems with improper management and failure to fulfill effective of NES starts from how appointment of head teachers is done to what happens after. In the current system, head teachers and Deputy Heads are basically appointed based on political affiliation and years of service (Dzimbiri, 2016). Such being the case, the issue of formal training in management does not really count. When managers are put into office, they depend much on what they will be told to do and experiences of other managers through handovers, this makes them to have limited power to decision making for example in discipline cases, the managers decisions largely ends at giving warnings, the next steps are referring to responsible officers for further action and sometimes reporting to police if the cases is criminal and waiting for further action, in most cases the reviews may not come in favor of the managers (Matenje & Forsyth, 2007).

Thirdly, it was mentioned that policies are not taught in pre-service institutions. School managers claimed that their failure to manage schools and reach its goals is because they never had a chance to learn about policies in college during their training.

“Only if these things were incorporated in the curriculum when we are trained as teachers, then we could easily implement them when we come to teach but we start hearing about policies when we are now working and they are confusing.” HT8

Literature has shown that teachers are expected to be proficient in curriculum and policy understanding implementation through training them while they are in college. Including Policy in teacher training programs can improve their ability to develop evident skills that could later be displayed in schools through better results (Charmers, 2007).

It was recommended by (Henard and Roseveare, 20012) that institutions of higher learning providing training to teachers should be keen and consider providing knowledge on policy and policy implementation in order to improve school management.

Indiscipline also came out as fourth factor that also hinders the achievement of effective practices of the NES. This include both indiscipline of teachers and learners. Below are sentiments from some participants:

*“The students lack discipline, the culture that the students have is that we should always push them, on their own they are not motivated.”*HT9

He also said that: *“Teachers does not respect authorities these days, the coming of human rights and lack of seriousness of the ministry gives these teachers the zeal to disobey and do whatever they want”*

Indiscipline is triggered by different causes, sometimes due to ill maintenance of discipline in educational institutions which later hampers the success of management (Kashyap, 2020). Handling of indiscipline issues not only causes distress but steals up valuable instructional time which limits students learning potential and leads to failure in achieving education standards.

The fifth factor given was lack of collaboration within management team and between management and teachers. The managers think that it could be easier to achieve the NES if there was corporation between management and the team of teachers as evident in this excerpt:

“It’s the attitude of the teachers, they think managers just want to find faults” DP4

On the same, DP7 narrated that:

*“Some head teachers do not share responsibilities with their deputies, the relationships are not good. They forget that headship can be done by everyone”*DP7

Lack of cooperation and collaboration hinders performance of instructional duties. This stirs up confusion and disorganization, it leads to communication breakdowns and professionals end up doing things according to individual preferences which disrupts educational goals. A common goal is what binds people together in their work and enables them to achieve positive outcomes (Slater, 2013). That goal right at the top is what everyone will be striving working towards. The principle of school managers working in isolation with their staff retards school improvement, people do not share ideas, improvements plans, expertise and other skills that leads to job satisfaction and professional growth (Slater, 2013).

Gregory, (2020) in a study where he explored Teacher and Staff collaboration during Elementary Schools is also in agreement to the findings of this study. According to Gregory, when administrators and staff members collaborate, it produces a stronger conducive environment, an implication of this is staff members develop stronger relationships and this can transfer into classroom environments as well.

Sixth is lack of follow ups on policy implementation. The study found out that visits to schools by inspectors are inadequate. From the document analysis where the researcher checked visitors books to see how often inspectors visit school it was noted that in some schools it has taken even about two years without being visited. Managers also complained that they do not have enough time to do the supervisions and follow-ups in place of the quality assurance team. Two responds agreed to this finding by saying:

*“The quality assurance team should visit schools frequently minimum twice a term, teachers would not relax”*DP4

*“Time is another hindering factor. We managers are also teachers but the NES demands time for a lot of activities e.g. supervision, this becomes hard for us unlike if we could just focus on management duties.”*HT6

School heads cannot manage to carry out daily and frequent observations of teachers. This leads to non-compliance of some minimum requirements resulting to compromises with effective performance duties, lack of supervision also increases frequency of damage (Roro, 2020).

Last but not least is inadequate resources. Good as resources are, they can also be a challenge and a factor leading to failure of proper school management. It was noted through the findings that schools are hardly provided with enough resources to aid accomplishment of standards for education. These resources include proper structures that are inclusive, finances, manpower, teaching and learning materials as well as a good learning environment.

“They are good things if they are to be implemented but the problem is implementation is impossible without resources” said DP5

This has been an outcry in many studies and literature but it continues to be a big problem not only here in Malawi but different countries as well (Njoroge, 2019, Maffea, 2020, Mupa, 2015 & Mutungwa, 2014). All these studies agrees to the fact that without required enough resources in schools, it becomes hard for learners, teachers and managers to achieve high performance.

Lastly, the management system. Most of the participants pointed that they are not capable of performing to the best of their abilities because the system limits them.

*“The system is also a challenge, a lot of activities are always on stand still because we wait on the central government to do them for us”*HT6

The current education system is more theoretical than practical. Other factors and efforts helping the accomplishments of the NES are neglected. Managers simply comply with the higher offices despising important actions that might help uplifting schools.

Developing countries have proved to have focused much on their education system and made reforms starting way back in the 1990s (UNESCO, 2020). Change and flexibility in education systems have also proved to increase student’s success in Turkey that is as regards to the findings of a study conducted by (Ates, et al., 2013)

5.0. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

The study covered to assess how secondary school managers in SEED discharge their duties to achieve effective practice level of the NES under management within a centralized education system. This chapter therefore presents a brief overview of the findings in chapter 4 related to objectives. This is then followed by the summary of findings, conclusion, recommendations based on the findings for the various stakeholders that may find this research important, for example educators, advisors, curriculum planners, the general public and policy makers and suggested areas for further research.

5.2. Main findings

The use of the conceptual framework structural and bureaucratic theories allowed the study to relate the findings and literature of the study regarding the experiences of secondary school managers who took part in the study. It mainly focused on the experiences that these managers go through in achieving the NES under management while working in a centralized system.

5.2.1. Objective one: Knowledge of school managers on the National NES and Description of the management System

The first objective aimed at finding out managers understanding of the NES under management and managers description of the education system that is currently been followed in secondary schools. The findings of the study found out the following:

Most of the school managers lacked knowledge of the NES under management. Some of the reasons of lack of knowledge being that, it has been years since they were oriented on the policy and of course lack of interest to know. Even though this was the case more than half of the schools visited had the policy document but in most cases under the custody of the head teacher and not the deputy head teacher.

In describing the system, it came to the conclusion of the researcher that the system of education in practice is highly centralized. Managers said the system depended highly on following: mandates, strict rules and regulations, meticulous record keeping, hierarchy, and power is concentrated on a single point or on few individuals. This is a typical description of a centralized education system. Though there was a mention of some decisions being made at school level, it was only partial. This showed that even though something's might be decentralized, the system remain centralized to a larger extent. Below is a summary of the themes under this objective;

5.2.2. Objective two: Implications of managing secondary schools in a centralized system in fulfilling effective practices of the NES under management.

Objective two was intended to sought implications of managing schools a centralized education system in full filling the NES under management. The findings of the study found that there are a lot of negative implications of the system towards full filling the NES under management than there are positive implication. Some examples include minimizing interaction between the school and the community, financial instabilities, increasing cases of indiscipline and delays in in decision making.

As a result of the implications, there are no proper punishments given to offenders, audits always have queries, management cannot deploy staff even if they have shortages, nevertheless school managers feel less empowered.

5.2.3. Objective three: Factors that affect the achievement of effective practices on NES under management.

The study found out that the following factors affect the achievement effective practices of the NES in Secondary schools found in SEED: Lack of required resources, knowledge gap, indiscipline, the management system, no collaboration between head teachers and other staff members, no frequent follow ups on policy implementation e.g. inspections are periodic as such people tend to relax, and no consultations from teachers and managers are made.

5.3. Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that, after seven years of inception the NES school managers still lack proper knowledge of the policy. Managers agreed to have heard of the NES but could not describe the same especially on what is required as management effective practices. This indicated one possible reason why only two of the ten schools visited reported to have reached the effective practices of the NES upon the last inspection to their schools. More than half of the participants said they work in a centralized system and the system has shown to bring implications like indiscipline, lack of cooperation and collaboration, delayed decision making, job security among others. These are key concepts in the structural and beauractratic theories which guided the study.

The lack of knowledge of the policy came out as a contributing factor to manager's failure to full filling effective practices of the NES in addition to lack of adequate resources, lack of follow-ups, less power given to managers and the management system. Consequently the fulfillment of the effective practices remain a problem

5.4. Recommendations

- The researcher strongly believe that the effectiveness of education can be delivered by managers who have necessary skills in management and since government fails to train and orient school mangers on their positions, the managers may not be ready to work. Therefore managers should try to attain managerial skills through upgrading themselves, reading and find ways to gain this kind of knowledge on their own
- Managers should find ways of voicing out their grievances that have proven to be effective in making authorities taking things seriously.
- School managers should serve as support system for teacher's tutors and support staff in order to ensure that there is a spirit of togetherness in cultivating a safe and positive learning environment.

- The Ministry of Education should consider going digital which is an easier way to share policy documents as well as conducting in-service trainings without physically present in all schools which might not be possible
- Ensure that teachers are trained on policy by incorporating the concept in their teacher training curriculum.
- Monitor the implementation of the NES in schools to ensure that what was intended is what is happening.
- Develop guidelines for school managers to ease the understanding of the NES and the process of guiding others on the implementation
- School heads are education managers, mentors and coaches to the school, a critical intermediary between the school and education system of the state. Reforms need to consider ways of making the position attractive to improve their professional practice in the school.

5.5. Limitations of the Study

- The Research was labor intensive since the searcher was the only person to reach out all ten schools that took part in the study.
- Time consuming, the study was conducted with 20 participants, data collection was based on appointment dates fixed with individual respondents.
- Sample size was small to make significant relationships from other managers, for example relating the results to other managers in the same education division since it only a few managers were sampled.
- Access was denied by other managers who did not have time and were busy with other duties. This might have led to just following through on the research.

- People's perception of research, most participants thought being a part of the research will give them a chance to earn money, this might have lessened their interest and the kind of information they provided might not reflect their true experiences.

5.6 Areas for further studies

- As a way of making sure that management standards are fulfilled the communities are supposed to take part, but during the time of research the researcher found that there is minimal involvement of parents in supervision as well as policy sharing with managers, in the centralized management system the role of communities do not clearly reflect, it would be good to know why this is the case and if at all it is contributing to the failure in fulfilling the NES under management.
- Managers complained about using the NES as a standard tool for all schools might not ideal since schools differ in the type of students they have, the resources they have and many other characteristics as such a research can be conducted to find out the effectiveness of using the NES as a standard tool for measuring all schools effectiveness.
- As much as a lot of studies have already been conducted on education decentralization, it would be ideal to look at this area here in Malawi. Some countries like Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, and South Africa seem to excel with education after decentralization, can the same happen in Malawi?

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