

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Learner-Centered Methods in the Teaching of Social Studies in Malawian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

In an effort to advance secondary education in Malawi, the Ministry of Education revised the secondary school curriculum in 2015 from teacher-centered to learner-centered under the Outcome Based Education to enhance the development of transferable skills in learners. Since the inception of the new curriculum, no study had been conducted to explore how teachers implement learner-centered methods in the new Social Studies curriculum. Therefore, this study was undertaken to explore secondary school teachers' use of learner-centered methods. The researchers in this paper report of the challenges secondary school Social Studies teachers faced when using the learner-centered methods. The study employed progressivism learning theory as its lens; and three categories of public secondary schools were involved. These include: national, conventional and community day secondary schools. Using the qualitative approach, data were generated through interviews, document analysis and lesson observations. Findings revealed that some Social Studies teachers experienced challenges in planning, preparation and implementation of learner-centered lessons. They also encountered challenges of engaging practices that promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. The study concluded that Social Studies teachers have potential to teach Social Studies using learner-centered teaching methods if given adequate support. The researchers in this study recommended that there was a need for provision of adequate teaching and learning resources in secondary schools. Secondly, there was a need to revise the new Social Studies curriculum because it was huge. Thirdly, the findings indicated that it was essential to provide teachers with in-service training so that they could have robust knowledge and skills on how to implement learner-centered teaching approaches.

Keywords: constructivism, learner-centered, outcomes-based education, social studies, progressivism learning theory.

1.0 Introduction

Malawi government adopted the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) curriculum at the secondary school level in 2015 in a process called Secondary School Curriculum and Assessment Reform (SSCAR). The review process started in 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2012). The intention was to improve the quality of education and to equip learners with necessary skills that could help them to live a meaningful life in society. According to Wisconsin Educational Association Council (1995) Outcome Based Education is where the school and community first

determine what skills and knowledge students should possess at graduation, then work backwards from there to develop curriculum, strategies and materials to help students achieve those goals, or exit outcomes. Schools in OBE are expected to fulfill their obligation of equipping all students with the competence and qualities needed to face the challenges beyond the school door (Spady, 1994). To attain all these skills in learners, learner-centered approaches should be emphasised to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Relatedly, the purpose of Social Studies is to help learners have a good understanding about important contemporary issues. Actually, the National Council for the Social Studies, (1992) defined Social Studies as the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Adamechi and Romaine (2000) agreed that the focus of Social Studies is to equip learners with practical, creative skills, values, and ingenuity to become functional members of the society.

In Malawi, Social Studies is taught under the OBE framework. However, the challenge is that in spite of the aims of Social Studies and the principles of OBE, the secondary school curriculum in Malawi still maintains standardised means of assessment through national examinations. Although the reform of the curriculum is deemed important, it is its implementation that can be problematic, given the context under which OBE is implemented. The researchers in this article, therefore, report of a study that explored secondary school teachers' use of learner-centered methods in implementing the Social Studies curriculum in secondary schools in Lilongwe district in Malawi. The study used progressivism learning theory as its lens and was guided by the following research question: What challenges do secondary school Social Studies teachers face when using learner-centered teaching approaches?

2.0 Literature Review

Learner-centered methods can best be understood as a main approach under constructivism pedagogies. The researchers in this section review literature and studies on learner-centred approaches under two major subtopics namely, conceptualising learner-centred methods and progressivism learning theory.

2.1 Conceptualising Learner-Centered Methods

Constructivism is an approach to teaching and learning that prioritises the learner as an agent of knowledge acquisition and understanding. Fosnot (2013), Colgan and Maxwell (2019) summarised constructivism as an approach that holds that knowledge involves meaning-making within the cultural and societal discussions that are inherent within the human environment. As Bada and Olusegun (2015) noted, that the approach is deliberately learner-centric, encouraging students to contribute to their education in active ways, rather than simply listening to and absorbing information passively. According to Whalen (2019) humans are the agents within this meaning-making process, as such, they should participate in debate and discussion within society and communities. Castillo and Paper (2008) advised that instead of being the focus of students' attention in the classroom, an

instructor in the constructivist classroom environment may instead be a facilitator. Constructivism focuses on the role that social interaction plays in creating knowledge. According to this model, knowledge is formed based on social interaction and social consensus. It is from this perspective that Social Studies could be effectively delivered. “Social Studies teachers must therefore encourage their students to engage in collaborative learning, use high-order thinking skills, construct their own knowledge about Social Studies concepts, and relate classroom lessons to their lives and experiences” (Rice & Wilson, 1999, p.32). The use of social constructivism in Social Studies classrooms would, therefore, change the way the classrooms are managed and the role of the teacher and learner.

Many studies have been conducted to find out the benefits of using learner-centered methods. For instance, in a study by Semerci and Batdi (2015) in Egyptian schools, the meta-analysis method was employed to investigate the impact of constructivist learning on student success rate and retention. The findings showed that academic achievement and retention were positively affected by the constructivist learning approach with benefits such as academic success and high student retention rates of students. Hijazi (2009) researched on the impact of constructivist learning through the randomised controlled approach in the context of teaching science and subsequent academic achievement and creative thinking in students, at the preparatory stage in Egyptian schools. The study showed that there were statistically significant differences in achievement and innovative thinking between the study groups examined, with the group that studied science under the constructivist learning approach showing superior results.

Although learner-centered teaching and learning approaches have been promoted by a lot of scholars, many teachers do not put that into practice (Semerci & Batdi 2015; Palmer, 2001). Becker (2000) noted that teachers are much more constructivist theoretically than in actual practice. From this, it is clear that the challenge is that teachers might have knowledge of learner-centered approaches, but they may not have transferable skills to implement the learner-centered teaching. Furthermore, An and Reigeluth (2011) reported that lack of knowledge about learner-centered instruction often prevent teachers from creating learner-centered classrooms even though they may have learner-centered beliefs. Kaymakamoğlu (2018) explored the English foreign language teachers’ beliefs, perceived practice and actual classroom practice in relation to traditional and constructivist teaching in Turkey. The results revealed that although the teachers expressed constructivist or both constructivist and traditional beliefs, their perceived practice was mostly traditional.

Besides, teachers face the challenge of large class size when teaching using the learner-centered teaching methods. Opolot-Okurut, Nakabugo and Masembe-Ssebbunga, (2015) stated that classes with too many learners are usually overcrowded and therefore limit the teacher-pupil interaction. Moreover, a study on class size and student achievement in California found that smaller classes had an influence on teacher quality in facilitating of learner-centred pedagogies and increased teacher-pupil interaction (Jepsen & Rivkin, 2009). Furthermore,

Mizrachi, Padilla and Susuwele (2010), acknowledged that introduction of free primary education in Malawi, increased the number of learners per class and this increase affected the effective implementation of learner-centred approaches. Additionally, a study by Mtika and Gates (2010) on learner-centered pedagogy in Malawi, agreed that a large class affects the formation of small groups that promote active learning by all learners. It also creates a shortage of space and resources thereby limiting the teacher's choice of instructional methods.

Lack of adequate teaching and learning resources is also a challenge that affects the implementation of learner-centered approaches when teaching Social Studies. Lattimer (2015) argued that a resource-constrained setting greatly challenges the effective implementation of learner-centered approaches as schools are poorly funded and fail to procure enough teaching and learning materials. A study by Bremner (2019) found that five Mexican English foreign language teachers were familiar with learner-centered approaches but adopted a hybrid combination of teacher and learner-centered practices due to contextual constraints in their teaching such as lack of teaching and learning resources. Gross (2003) noted that availability of teaching and learning resources easily create a conducive educational environment. Learner-centered approaches are perceived as pertinent in the teaching of Social Studies for learners to become informed citizens. In addition, thinking capacity is developed when critical questioning skills are employed among students. Thinking capacity enables learners to make sound and rational decisions that they use to overcome dilemmas in their lives (Weerhe, 2007).

1.2 Progressivism Learning Theory

The study employed John Dewey's progressivism learning theory, because it is in line with principles of learner-centered approaches. Progressivism theory is embedded in experiential learning that develops within a social environment (Dewey, 1985). Chesimet, Githua, and Ng'eno (2016), stated that experiential learning can exist without a teacher and relates solely to the meaning making process of the individuals' direct experience. Dewey (1929) argued that the only true education comes with the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he/she finds himself/herself. Thus, the educational enterprise is both a psychological and a sociological one, as such, an educator ought to understand the learner's background in order to initiate him/her into the social setting (Dewey, 1929). Learning should therefore seek for learners' participation as the role of the teacher to the learner is chiefly in the sociological dimension. Makewa, Mukami, Ngussa, Njoroge, and Kuboja (2015), stated that if students are well prepared to work in small groups and if the groups are well organised, students' collaboration can increase students' achievement more than when traditional methods of learning are used.

Progressivism in education emphasises a number of qualities that are important for the development of the child (Darling 1994). These include experiential learning, emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking, group work and

development of social skills. Labaree (2005) acknowledged that activities make learners interact with one another and in this way, they develop necessary skills to survive in the society. Dewey as cited by Vashishtha, Khandai, and Mathur, (2011) argued that action must precede knowledge and that knowledge is a result of the child's activities with the environment. Ngussa and Makewa (2014), established that high performing students tend to engage in active participation more frequently than their lower performing counterparts.

On the curriculum, Dewey noted that it has to grow out of the child's interests, Vashishtha et al., (2011) identified the main characteristics and principles of the curriculum, which include the need for the curriculum to reflect social life and social activities. Dewey (1985) posited that to facilitate learning, the forms of skills to be acquired and the subject matter to be learnt must generate interest in learners. Since learners come to school with their interests, the teacher should use these interests to organise activities towards valuable results (Westbrook, 1999). Furthermore, Dewey (1985) recommended three methods of teaching. These are learning by doing, learning by integration and learning through productive and creative activities. The teacher is there to guide the learners.

The study employed three principles of Dewey's progressivism learning theory namely, the necessity of stimulation of learners' interest to learn during the learning process, learners' involvement during the lesson presentation, and provision of activities that enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. For teachers to involve learners in the lesson, they are supposed to come up with lesson activities that engage learners in different ways. When learners are involved in the lesson their interest to learn is stimulated, and such a platform creates a conducive environment for learners to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Hence, progressivism learning theory acted as a lens through which the results of the study were seen.

3.0 Research Methodology

The researchers in this section describes and justifies the research design and methodology utilised in this study. They also describe and justify the location of the study, population and sampling procedures, and sample size. Furthermore, the researchers present data generation and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design, which is defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The output of qualitative research is descriptive in nature and it helps the researcher to better understand the feelings of the respondents (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The case study approach was employed in the study. The case study approach "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple

sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Leedy and Ormrod (2005), stated that a case study may be especially suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study involved three public secondary schools namely a community day secondary school, a conventional secondary school and a national secondary school. This was to ensure that the results of the study could reflect all the three contexts of public secondary schools in Malawi (Best & Kahn, 2006). Using purposive sampling, the researchers sampled two Social Studies teachers from each secondary school who participated in the study in order to have a balanced view of the problem under study. Teachers who had taught in Junior secondary school for three years under the new OBE curriculum were selected because of their teaching experience. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), stated that in many cases, purposive sampling is used in order to access knowledgeable people, that is, those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise or experience.

3.3 Sources of Data

The study employed the following as sources of data:

3.3.1 In-depth Interviews

Data were generated using the in-depth interviews. Following the principles of progressivism learning theory, participants were interviewed on how they used the learner-centered methods in the teaching of Social Studies. Data from the interviews consist of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Best & Kahn 2006). The approach was therefore chosen, because it helped participants to express their views and experiences concerning the matter under study. Interviews also give the interviewer chance to probe and seek further clarification for better understanding.

3.3.2 Lesson Observations

The researchers also engaged lesson observations to generate data. They acted as non-participant observers. Junior secondary school Social Studies teachers were observed when teaching to find out if lesson practices were in line with tenets of learner-centered methods. Each teacher was observed for three times in the process of teaching. Researchers observed how teachers established and implemented classroom practices that involved learners in critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It was necessary to engage observations during the data generation process, because observations allow the researcher to actually see what people do rather than what they say they do (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005).

3.3.3 Review of Documents

Atkinson and Coffey (1997, p.47) refer to documents as “social facts which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways.” Document review is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies and intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program (Yin, 2014). In this study, lesson plans, schemes of work and mark books were analysed, to find out if participants applied appropriate procedures for learner-centered approaches. Document review is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of data triangulation (Denzin, 1970).

3.4 Analysis of Data

Data were analysed using the framework of progressivism learning theory in that the researchers employed thematic data analysis procedures (Creswell, 2009). The first step was to reduce data by transcribing the interviews and read it to make sense of what it was saying, and grouping information from interviews, classroom observations and documents. Later the data were coded to assist in coming up with themes (Morse, 2008, p. 727). The themes allowed researchers to classify patterns, which mostly revealed challenges of using learner-centered approaches (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Later, literature was used to create concepts (Peel, 2019) that informed and guided the thematic data analysis to present the findings.

3.5 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Creswell (2009), states that credibility is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researchers, the participants, or the readers of an account. To ensure authenticity of the findings, the researchers employed multiple sources of data which helped in triangulation of the findings (Patton (1990). In addition, peer debriefing was employed in which supervisors from the university critiqued the work to ensure that the interpretations were accurate.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Education Division Manager of the Central West Education Division, and the head teachers from secondary schools under study after presenting a letter of introduction from University of Malawi. To respect the participants’ rights, researchers made sure that all the participants had adequate information that clearly explained the nature of the study and their participation in it (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). The researchers also provided a guarantee that all responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms were used for the schools (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). All the respondents participated in the study voluntarily and each one signed a consent form presented to him or her (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009).

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The aim of the study was to establish challenges that Social Studies teachers face when using learner-centered approaches in the teaching of Social Studies under the OBE curriculum. The findings exhibited challenges of achieving the tenets of progressivism learning theory. Results were discussed under the following categories: the challenges faced during planning, preparation and implementation of learner-centred methods and the challenges of advancing critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners.

4.1 Challenges on Planning, Preparation and Instructional Delivery

The study revealed that Social Studies teachers faced challenges when teaching the new Social Studies curriculum. These include, the challenge of involving resource persons in the preparation of a lesson, the challenge of curriculum overload and the challenge of examination-oriented teaching. The section below presents these challenges as follows:

4.1.1 The Challenge of Involving Resource Persons in the Preparation of a Lesson

Participants of the study indicated a need for involving resource persons in some of the lessons of the new Social Studies curriculum as a challenge they faced when using learner-centered approaches. Respondents from all schools emphasised the need for involving resource persons in planning, preparing and implementation of the lesson. One of the participants explained that:

If you look at the syllabus, most of the lessons or topics require us to use resource persons. Sometimes, these experts are hard to access because they lack time and money for transport or payment. So, that is a challenge... (Participant 4, Lipimbi school).

This finding is in line with what Awino (1987) found that very superior resource people are too busy with their occupations that they are not reliable, and some resource persons need payment which is normally not forthcoming. This challenge originates from the fact that the new OBE curriculum has new topics, which are difficult for teachers to comprehend. To solve the problem teachers sometimes involve resource persons in planning, preparation and implementation of their lessons. Unfortunately, as enunciated by the participants, sometimes this invites other problems, for these resource persons might not be easily accessible.

4.1.2 The Challenge of Curriculum Overload

During the study, the researchers found out that the scope of the content of the new Social Studies curriculum was huge. The study noted that in spite of the proclaimed move towards OBE and its benefits to learners, the curriculum still remained content-based. Respondents from all schools explained that curriculum overload is a challenge. The study revealed that the new Social Studies curriculum has a lot

of content which has to be examined in standardised national examinations. One of the participants pointed out that:

Yah!!! You are supposed to work against time. You are supposed to use learner-centered approaches and we are saying there is a lot of content. So, you are wrestling against two things, completion of the content and using the learner-centered approaches. That is why we just use lecture method for us to complete the syllabus. (Participant 5, Mphande school).

The scope of the content of the new Social Studies curriculum forced teachers to work against time for they needed to finish the content before the examination period. This encouraged teachers to resort to lecture method which is contrary to the purpose of OBE which puts much emphasis on learners. According to Killen (2000), the principle of clarity of focus in OBE implies that everything teachers do must be clearly focused on what they want learners to ultimately be able to do successfully. Thus, when teachers plan, prepare and teach they should focus on helping learners to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions that will enable them, eventually, to achieve significant outcomes that have been clearly expressed. The present study concurs with the one conducted by the Malawi Institute of Education-MIE (2007) which found that because of the examination orientation and curriculum overload in the Malawian old curriculum, teachers rushed through the content to cover the syllabus. This was one of the reasons that necessitated the review of the curriculum. Ironically, as noted in this study, the new OBE syllabus has remained content-led and maintained standardised national examinations.

The huge content in the new curriculum influenced Social Studies teachers not to conduct continuous assessment. Teachers from all schools under study agreed that they found it difficult to assess learners during the teaching and learning process. Interviews confirmed this as one of the participants stated that:

In terms of assessment, you will not even have time to assess learners; because your focus is to finish the content. Sometimes, you end up the period exactly after 40 minutes, hence, no time to ask questions because your focus is to finish what you planned for that day. Even to give them a test it will be seen as if you are wasting time, sitting down to mark... (Participant 4, Lipimbi school).

This finding was triangulated by data from documents at Kachima national secondary school, where mark books showed that only midterm examination and final examination results were recorded. Similarly, at Mphande community day secondary school mark books indicated results for summative assessment only. Furthermore, researchers during lesson observations noted that teachers in all schools did not evaluate their lessons at the end of each lesson due to lack of enough time. Continuous assessment helps teachers and students to make judgments about their performance, to plan different ways of improving their performance and to set goals for further learning. If teachers do not conduct continuous assessment, they

might not make informed decisions on the progress of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, lack of continuous assessment has negative implications on outcomes-based education, because teachers are not able to ascertain whether the intended outcomes have been attained or not.

4.1.3 The Challenge of Examination Oriented Teaching

As has been noted above, the study found that regardless of the new Social Studies curriculum being outcomes-based, it is still examination oriented. Respondents from all schools agreed that the new curriculum is examination oriented. One of the participants narrated that:

The problem we have is that we teach our students to pass examinations. You think I will only teach two topics; and I will develop that critical thinking and problem-solving skills, but are they going to question the problem-solving and critical thinking? No, they are going to ask the content, so, we only focus on content so that students can pass examinations. (Participant 5, Mphande school).

This is against the principle of expanded opportunities for the outcomes-based education. It is obvious that “traditional ways of organising school do not make it easy for teachers to provide expanded opportunities for all learners” (Killen, 2000, p. 4). The study concurs with that of Lowe (2008) that “the emphasis on external examination as in the colonial period adopted by the newly independent Malawi government militated against change” (p.3). So, it is with the current Social Studies curriculum. The findings in this study relate well with those from Namphande (2018) where he found that pedagogy in Social Studies lessons at a community day secondary school and a conventional secondary school was teacher dominated with the view to complete the syllabus in readiness for national examinations.

4.2 The Challenge of Promoting Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills in Learners

The findings of the study, showed that Social Studies teachers faced a number of challenges that hindered them from developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. The challenges were categorised into four themes as follows: inadequate teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, learners’ perceptions of teachers as masters of knowledge, and lack of skills in teachers to develop critical thinking. These themes are discussed as follows.

4.2.1 Inadequate Teaching and Learning Resources

In-depth interviews showed that some teachers failed to engage activities that nurture critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners during lesson implementation, because they lacked enough teaching and learning resources. Lesson observations showed that some teachers failed to engage activities that foster critical thinking and problem solving skills in learners during lesson

implementation, because they had inadequate teaching and learning resources. For instance, at Mphande community day secondary school and Kachima national secondary school, teachers did not involve learners much in most of their lessons due to inadequate teaching and learning resources. One of the participants lamented: *We have problems of lack of learning materials, for instance, we have only one book for Social Studies...* (Participant 3, Kachima school).

At Lipimbi community day secondary school teachers did not use any kind of teaching and learning resource at all during the teaching and learning process. This encouraged teachers to use lecture method. This is in line with what National Tempus Offices (2007) found that, amongst the reasons that hindered the proper implementation of student-centered teaching was paucity of resources. The findings support the observations from Bremner's study (2019) which found that five Mexican English foreign language teachers were familiar with learner-centered approaches but adopted a hybrid combination of teacher-centered and learner-centered practices due to contextual constraints in their teaching contexts. These findings are in conflict with assertions of Adamechi and Romaine (2000) who stated that the focus of Social Studies is to equip the learner with practical, creative skills, values, and ingenuity to become a functional member of the society.

4.2.2 Overcrowded Classrooms

Overcrowded classrooms also posed a challenge for teachers to advance critical thinking and problems solving skills in learners. This was noted in all three schools. At Lipimbi district boarding secondary school, there were 70 students in the Social Studies class, and teachers emphasised on collaborative learning, but it was observed that some of the students were not able to participate in their respective groups due to lack of space in the classroom. There were 108 students in a Social Studies class at Mphande community day secondary school. A desk meant for three students was being used by five learners. There were 52 students in a Social Studies class at Kachima national secondary school. A desk meant for one student was being used by three learners. This sitting arrangement hindered learners from learning in groups, hence, teachers opted for lecture method during the teaching and learning process. This is contrary to the tenet of progressivism learning theory which regards students as active participants in teaching and learning process. The observations from Mphande community day secondary school supported the findings of the study by Mwala (2012), in community day secondary schools where teacher-centered instruction took centre-stage due to high pupil-teacher ratio.

4.2.3 Learners' Perceptions of Teachers as Masters of Knowledge

As expected by the progressivism learning theory, learning should involve active interaction among students and teachers. Castillo and Paper (2008) advised that instead of being the focus of students' attention in the classroom, an instructor in the constructivist classroom environment may instead be a facilitator. This implies that teachers should not teach but rather take a role of a facilitator. The study noted

that learners regarded teachers as masters of knowledge. Respondents of the study commented that learners consider teachers as the only source of true knowledge. They expected teachers to tell them everything. It can, however, be argued that this perception by students can be justifiable considering the paucity of resources in the schools. Nonetheless, this perception negatively affected Social Studies teachers' efforts to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. One of the respondents stated that, *the main challenge is that learners think that you all know everything, as such, learners do not want to argue...* (Participant 3, Kachima School). This finding is in line with the study by Namphande, Clarke, Farren, and McCully (2017) which revealed that, learners regard teachers as sources of true knowledge. This is very problematic as far as advancement of critical thinking and problem-solving skills is concerned. Because, for teachers to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners, they have to engage them in different authentic activities.

4.2.4 Lack of Skills in Teachers to Develop Critical Thinking

Respondents of the study acknowledged that lack of skills in teachers to develop critical thinking is another challenge they faced. This challenge emanates from the fact that, sometimes teachers lack proper training to develop proper skills necessary for the acquisition of teaching and learning strategies that enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. One of the participants explained that, *sometimes as a teacher you may also lack some skills on how to implement that...* (Participant 4, Lipimbi school).

The benefits of training were clearly reported by Sodoma and Else (2009) who recognised that training opportunities for teachers help them feel more comfortable with the challenges of the new experiences. Seng (2014) in investigating teachers' view on student-centred learning approaches in Malaysia, found that shifting from 'chalk and talk' approach to learner-centered education has not been easy because extra skills are needed in implementing the approach. Furthermore, Usman (2002) said "the more teachers who are qualified and well trained the greater the success in achieving educational reforms" (p. 10). Hence, proper training for teachers is crucial for the implementation of learner-centered teaching as this will develop confidence and boost knowledge and skills on how to put the reforms into practice.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that, Social Studies teachers failed to plan, prepare and implement learner-centered lessons successfully due to the challenges of availability of new terminologies in the new Social Studies curriculum, the examination-oriented teaching, curriculum overload and inadequate time for continuous assessment. These challenges had negative implications on outcomes-based education, because teachers were not able to determine whether the intended outcomes had been achieved or not. Besides, teachers faced the challenges to advance critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners due to inadequate teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, learners' perceptions

of teachers as masters of true knowledge, and lack of skills in teachers to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. This is contrary to progressivism learning theory which states that learners should be active participants in the teaching and learning process.

The researchers in this study also concluded that Social Studies teachers have potential to teach Social Studies using learner-centered teaching methods if given adequate support. There was a need for provision of adequate teaching and learning resources in secondary schools, for this would help teachers to prepare learner-centered lessons successfully. Secondly, there was a need to revise the new Social Studies curriculum because it was huge. In competency-based learning most of the time is devoted to the practice of competencies not mastering as much content as in content-based system. Thirdly, the findings indicated that it was essential to provide teachers with in-service training so that they could have robust knowledge and skills on how to implement learner-centered teaching approaches. Well trained teachers is a key to successful implementation of Social Studies curriculum in Malawian secondary schools. Lastly, teachers needed to be resourceful. For instance, the study by Namphande (2018) about Pedagogy and the education of citizens for democracy in Malawian secondary schools, noted that there was a challenge of short supply of textbooks in Malawian secondary schools. However, teachers were able to use photocopied diagrams, tables, and case studies. These materials provided the required resources to enhance learning.

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