



Reconciling Policy and practice in Open Secondary Schools' (OSS) admission: The
case of two schools in Zomba

M.Ed. (POLICY, PLANNING & LEADERSHIP) THESIS

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Submitted to the School of Education in partial fulfillment for the award
of the degree of Master of Education (Policy, Planning & Leadership).

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

FEBRUARY 2025

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, unequivocally declare that this study is solely my original work and has never been submitted to any other institution for examination. Where relevant, I have acknowledged the use of other people's works and with this accept full responsibility for the content of the study.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my fallen parents **Darlington** and **Cecilia** for your divine intervention in each and every step of my life. I know that this significant leap I have taken began with you; as such my gratitude is profoundly deep. It is my wish that this will live on through my lineage. Special dedication to my children, for they are the time capsules to carry the legacy forward.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With profound gratitude, I extend my sincerest acknowledgements to those who played important roles in the forming of this dissertation.

Firstly, I salute my supervisor, Associate Professor Chikumbutso Manthalu whose guidance, unwavering support, spirited expertise and tremendous wisdom have been crucial to the development and fruition of this paper.

My heartfelt thanks go to the esteemed lecturers and support staff in the Education Department for generously sharing knowledge and insights during the course. Your contributions undoubtedly enriched this study and my gratitude to you is profoundly deep.

I am also grateful to the Headmaster and staff of Cobbe Community Day Secondary School for your unwavering support and encouragement. The chance you offered me to pursue the knowledge I have obtained shall always be a reminder of the family I have in you, Salute.

My wife, Ulemu and our son Sonyezo, morale wanga, whenever I was down during the course, you lifted my spirits and encouraged me to work forth. You both made this journey exciting, unforgettable and worthwhile. For that I love you

ABSTRACT

The research aimed at exploring the admission practices and processes in open secondary schools and their nature of compliance to the admission aspirations of the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) mandate and the National Education Policy (NEP). The study used interpretivism focusing on the perceptions and experiences of the policy's stakeholders on admission praxis and processes in Zomba City open schooling. The research contested the nature of awareness about standard admission requirements in OSS, the processes, practice and primary considerations of admission in OSS and how policy enforcers (MCDE and MoEST/DES) interface with Open Secondary Schools to conform to admission policy standards. Purposive Sampling was used to identify the open schools and the responsible admission policy stakeholders. Host School headteachers, OSS coordinators, OSS MoEST officials responsible for admissions were engaged. Content and thematic methods through N vivo were used to analyse the data generated. The research found that OSS administrators tend to manipulate the admission policy to their ego needs, where financial gains and other informal influences lead to indiscriminate admission of students. The data also revealed the need for a sound regulatory framework in OSS to curb haphazard implementation and manipulation of the admission policy. Training, inspections, clear sanctioning and coordination and cooperation have been suggested for a strong regulatory framework. The research addresses the policy and practice divide in OSS by analysis the causes and consequences of admission policy non-compliance and proposing actionable solutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DoDEL – Directorate of Distance Education and Learning

DSE – Directorate of Secondary Education

GFT – Goal Frame Theory

GoM – Government of Malawi

HH1 – Host Head teacher of school 1

HH2 – Host Head teacher of school 2

JCE - Junior Certificate of Education

MCDE- Malawi Centre of Distance Education

MoEST – Ministry of Education Science and Technology

MSCE – Malawi School Certificate of Education

NEP – National Education Policy

ODL – Open and Distance Learning

OSS – Open Secondary School

PSLCE - Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education

PSS – Public Secondary Schools

SEED – South East Education Division

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the study that examines how the admission policy is reconciled with practice in Open Secondary Schools at two host schools in Zomba City. Firstly, it describes the background of admission policy regarding public secondary schools (PSS) and open secondary schools (OSS). Then it describes the problem statement, purpose, significance, delimitations and limitations of the study.

1.2 Study Background

The National Education Policy postulates that the Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) determines students' eligibility for secondary education. It further states in priority area 2, that after two years of secondary education, students sit for a Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) examination which qualifies them to enter senior secondary (MoEST, 2016). The Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) is a body responsible for the running of open secondary schools (OSS) in Malawi. Its mandate is also clear on how to admit students in the OSS where prospective students are supposed to produce evidence that they passed Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) and Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) examinations when being admitted by the OSS coordinators into junior and senior secondary classes respectively (MCDE, 2017).

The newly developed National Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) policy also refers to the MCDE mandate as far as how admission practice is to be conducted in OSS (GoM, 2021). The ODeL's main goal is to promote Open, Distance and e-Learning and innovation that enables equitable access to quality education at all levels in Malawi. To achieve this goal the policy has the following objectives namely to: "improve equitable access to ODeL; enhance the quality and relevance of ODeL programs; develop relevant ODeL programmes and systems and improve the governance, management and investment in ODeL" (p. 21). The policy's priority area number 1.2, which focuses on equitably accessed ODeL for secondary schools, reckons that OSS students are usually not selected, but make it through self and school initiative to register, with support from MCDE.

Open schools have mushroomed in many developing countries following a realization that open learning could be a cost-effective way to increase access to secondary school (Mahonya, 2017; COL, 2020). Ngware et al (2018) carried out a research which examined alternative education programs of which OSS is part of, in different Sub-Sahara African (SSA) countries. They reported that alternative education programs take different forms in different countries. Zimbabwe has the Zimbabwe Accelerated Learning Program (ZALP), to make sure that students have the admission prerequisite for secondary education. The model strives to integrate out of school youth (OOSY) back into mainstream secondary education. The model targets OOSY within senior primary school going age that dropped out of primary school education to catch up and sit for final primary education exams so that they transition into formal secondary school education system, or are ready for different pathways like the Part Time Continuing Education (PTCE), which is a form of open secondary schooling in the country. Youths targeted under this model are those who were unable

to enter formal primary school classes for various reasons like being too old, could not afford the educational costs, and other personal/social reasons (World Education, 2016).

Another model that addresses the ODL admission discrepancy being looked into by this research is the second chance model which is designed to provide the equivalent of a secondary school education to youths who do not have a chance to pass through formal education system or who had a chance but dropped out because of pregnancy or lack of fees (Likoye, 2017). Botswana's Springboard Humanism (SBH) project which was initiated by an NGO uses this model. It aims to empower young women and orphaned male youths from marginalized indigenous groups who dropped out of secondary school after failing the Junior Certificate Examination to re-sit and pass the Junior Certificate Examination (JCE). The program aims at enabling these out-of-school youths to re-enter senior secondary school and enhance their access to vocational training programs. The PTCE of Zimbabwe also uses this model for OOSY to continue secondary education (Ngware et al, 2018). All these models emphasize the need for qualifications as a prerequisite for students to enter into a particular level of education. The ZALP fast-tracks OOSY to attain primary school leaving certificate to access junior secondary education, whereas the BSH is meant to enable OOSY access to senior secondary education.

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) and the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BODOCOL) are leading examples of open schooling with the enrolment of 28,942 and 25,736 students in 2009 respectively (Commonwealth of Learning, 2010). The OSS targeted enrolment in Malawi by 2012 was 18, 961 and 34, 069 by 2017. The enrolment was at 6,939 in 2007 and has been on the increase since 2004 (World Bank, 2010). The average annual growth rate in

OSS between 2001 and 2004 was less than 20% while between 2004 and 2007 the rate was at 52% (World Bank 2010). This growth indicates how much of a role, OSS are playing in offering access to secondary education.

Before the year 1998, MCDE supervised and provided open distance education through distance education centres (DEC) and night secondary schools (NSS). Then the DECs were repossessed by the MoEST and were turned into community day secondary schools (CDSS). The NSS remained under the MCDE and they were turned into open secondary schools (OSS) in 2002. Ever since, the numbers of OSSs have been growing considerably. Records show growth of OSSs from 64 in 2011/12 to 304 in 2017/18 (MoEST, 2019). With this considerable growth, the OSS is playing an important role in providing access to students who fail to secure space in PSS, out of school youths and repeating students. Hence, this study aimed to find out whether admission practices were true to the policy requirements.

There are discrepancies in the way students are admitted into OSSs and PSSs. Admission in PSSs is centrally controlled and regulated by the MoEST which releases and provides to prospective schools the names of students who qualify for the next academic level (Chimombo, Meke, Zeitlyn & Lewin, 2014). On the other hand, admission into OSS is solely done by school coordinators who are responsible for the vetting of students' qualifications before registering them in a particular academic level (MCDE, 2017). The OSS coordinator then coordinates all the administrative activities with the host head teacher and the MCDE. This means every OSS has its admission officer thereby rendering the process decentralised. So, reconciling admission policy and practice in regards to this study means ensuring policy awareness for the stakeholders or implementers and that the OSS coordinators admit students as per the guidelines in the NEP and MCDE mandate. The OSS Coordinators

are obliged to provide access to secondary education to students who possess prerequisite qualifications. However, Yates (2008) notes that despite Malawi being one of the oldest distance education systems in Africa, some of its existing practices in open learning lack clarity in the way they aid compliance with policy regulations. Gwede (2014) also notices that the operations of MCDE are found wanting, due to inadequate funding which enticed this study to look into the interface between the OSS coordinator and the MCDE.

All in all, the government is after improving access to quality secondary education through strengthening open learning (MoEST, 2019). This open learning in secondary schools is largely offered by the OSS in Malawi (MCDE, 2017). Unlike OSS practices, and design, the public secondary schools' system of admission is built to safeguard the aspirations stipulated in the National Education Policy as to students' eligibility for their admission in different levels of secondary education. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) is obligated to publish names of successful students who are supposed to move into Form 1 and Form 3 in public secondary schools. Pertaining to the fact that there are regulatory authorities that ensure adherence to the admission policy into public secondary schools; the question that lurks is how compliant is practice in OSS with the NEP and the MCDE policy of admission in terms of admitting students with prerequisite qualifications? What initiatives and practices by both implementers and regulators are there to safeguard what the admission policies postulate? What really motivates the admission policy implementers to comply or not. Further to this, Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) note that local implementation is hampered if national government does not design clear and consistent directives with respect to the behaviour from implementing agents and agencies. Therefore the OSS, as the admission policy implementation

context, needs to be examined since the policy is implemented differently from the PSS. Chimpololo (2010) also notices that the MCDE is economically shorthanded as such most administrative and regulatory practices are at the mercy of the coordinator and the administrative team of the open schools.

1.3 Problem Statement

Admission into the public secondary schools is centrally managed and regulated by the Ministry of Education which effects placement of qualified students in the next academic level (Kadzamira, Winiko, Kaombe & Rossitter, 2023). The ministry determines students' progression to the next level hence it provides respective public secondary schools with lists of qualified students. This process ensures that no unqualified student is allowed to move to the next level without meeting the required standards. On the other hand, the OSS admission is generally decentralized to schools that almost act autonomously. OSS coordinators are tasked with the placement process of students when admitting them into their respective schools. The study therefore examined such admission practices in OSS in the context of the NEP's admission aspiration to maintain quality by making sure that only students with prerequisite qualification are admitted in the next academic level. It is no secret that OSS fare poorly in national examinations due to a multitude of other factors as observed by Du Vivier (2009), Madziatayika-Phiri (2017) and Mahonya (2017). Muniyimbiri conducted a study in 2014 which investigated the challenges of OSSs running within a conventional secondary school at Katoto, Rumphu and Chilumba secondary schools. The research used the case study design. To ensure representative samples, learners were sampled using stratified method, whereby they were divided into different classes and sex. Convenience sampling was used in selection of administrators from both the open and conventional schools. Findings showed that

there were no establishments of structures by Government to ensure supervision in the running of open secondary schools. It was also revealed that challenges were caused by neglecting the rules on admission which consequently affected performance of OSS students at national examination.

The decentralized nature of admission in OSSs was examined to check if practice was compliant to the admission policy as per stipulated in the MCDE mandate and the NEP, or not. For that reason, this research also examined the nature of interaction between OSS, MCDE and the Ministry of Education, and their roles in the placement of students in a particular level. In public secondary schools the checks are inherent since students who move to the next level are published and evidence is in the public domain, for instance on the MoEST website and individual schools' records.

It was therefore important to find out whether the admission practices and regulatory structures in OSS are consistent with the NEP's and the MCDE mandate's admission requirements. The policy requires that prospective Form 1 students must have the PSLCE in order to be admitted into a particular OSS and likewise Form 3 students must possess a JCE (GoM, 2021). It was necessary to interrogate whether and how open secondary schools' admission practice was consistent with the admission requirements, furthermore, to establish the motivation of (non-)compliance to the policy in the OSS.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The study intends to find out the consistency of admission practice in OSSs as per required in the National Education Policy and the Malawi Centre for Distance Education (MCDE) mandate. To achieve its purpose the study was guided by the following research questions:

1.4.1 Main Research Question

How consistent is admission practice in OSS with National Education Policy and MCDE mandate requirements?

1.4.2 Specific Questions

1. What is the nature of awareness in Open Secondary Schools about standard admission requirements as per the NEP aspirations?
2. What are the processes of and the primary considerations in OSSs admission?
3. How do relevant regulatory authorities (MoEST and MCDE) interface with Open Secondary Schools to conform to admission policy standards?

1.5 The Scope of the Study

The study aims to unveil the admission practices in OSS as regards compliance to the admission policy requirements stipulated in the MCDE mandate and National Education Policy. It engages the frontline policy implementers comprising two host school head teachers, two OSS coordinators; and the policy regulators which includes the MoEST official and MCDE official overseeing policy implementation in secondary schools. The OSSs engaged are from the south east education division (SEED) in Zomba District where one is hosted at a community day secondary school and the other at a boarding district conventional secondary school. The frontline policy implementers and policy regulators were interviewed to give an insight of their admission practice and regulation respectively. Students in forms one and three were also engaged in a focus group discussion (FGD) to inform the researcher of how they were admitted in their respective schools.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

The sample involved policy regulators who were always engaged to other commitments due to the nature of their work that it affected the timings of the interviews and the planned research finances. The interviews were constantly postponed that one of the key respondent had to delegate junior officials in the follow

up interviews. The researcher conducted 18 face to face and over video calls interviews and FDGs. Each respondent was engaged in a minimum of 3 interviews that spanned over 45 minutes to 90 minutes each. Some of the interviews were carried out electronically through video calls to mitigate travelling costs. This affected the responses as issues of secrecy arose to what they termed sensitive questions. The timeframe of the research was also stretched due to such developments. The focus group discussions were also affected as students were withdrawn from classes to attend the discussions. In essence, time constraint was persistent across the board as both host head teachers felt the interviews affected their schedule as they were to be engaged in other income generating activities. Since students were selected on a random basis for the focus group discussions, there were students who were repeating the senior cycle as such their responses were based on their admission in the junior cycle because the time they started the senior cycle the junior certificate examination had been removed from the secondary cycle. However, being an FGD the researcher documented responses of students who had recently enrolled in Form 3 after the JCE was reinstituted.

1.7 Significance of the Study

One of the agenda of the Government of Malawi has been to improve the access and quality of education at all levels (MoEST, 2019). It is with this focus that the government established MCDEs to complement the mainstream secondary schools due to space issues. Recent upturn of OSS students' numbers prompted this study. The commitment of the government can also be seen in various policy and strategic documents. However, the performance of students who have been enrolled in open and distance learning are affected with a number of factors which have not been well researched and presented, though they still affect students' performance (Chimpololo,

2010). One such factor is the admission practices in the schools. Taking the one rural and one urban OSS as the contexts of the study, it aimed at portraying admission practices therein; hence it has the following significance:

- 1 To contribute to the stringent literature of educational policy implementation studies especially on admission practice in the OSS as well as the Malawian education as a whole
- 2 And possibly to inform the concerned stakeholders of the admission policy opportunities and challenges in OSSs

1.8 Operational definitions of key terms

Admission- process of entering students into an OSS after vetting students' prerequisite requirements

Host Head teachers – is the head of the host institution whom the overall authority of the OSS is vested in him or her.

Interpretivism – is based on the assumption that is subjective, multiple and socially constructed where one's reality is understood to be shaped by one's experience of the reality.

OSS – a form of distance education under the authority of MCDE that makes use of facilities and teachers of other schools but operate outside of the conventional class hours.

OSS Coordinator – is a delegated position by the host head teacher to a teacher whose responsibility is to run the OSS smoothly.

Policy Awareness – refers to the understanding and knowledge of the rules. Regulations and guidelines set by educational institution, governing bodies or government regarding stipulated processes of a policy.

Policy implementation – refers to the process of putting into action the rules, regulations and guidelines established in a particular policy ensuring that they are effectively carried out.

PSS - are mainstream secondary schools, which are categorized as Grant aided, District conventional day and boarding and Community day secondary schools which host OSSs.

Receiving teachers – refers to educators who take responsibility for students with special needs as they transition into their classroom or program, ensuring appropriate support and continuity in their education.

1.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the background information to the study, defined the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and the research questions that are answered by this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter offers insight on issues that pertain to the open and distance education admission practice. It will delve into the literature that generally pursues policy awareness in Malawi and specifically adjudge how policy implementers conduct themselves in the context of the admission policy with regard to their knowledge of the policy in OSS.

2.2 Admission Policy Awareness in Malawi OSS

2.2.1 *Policy Awareness*

Policy awareness provides representations of policies in order to facilitate compliance with stated rules and enables accountability when rules are intentionally or accidentally broken (Knapp, 2012). Jovarauskaite, Balunde, Truskauskaite-Kuneviciene, Kaniusonyte, Zukauskiene and Poskus (2020) further notice that policy awareness increases the likelihood of policy-congruent behaviour, where they concluded that individuals may differ in the extent to which they notice certain policies; thus, psychological factors can have a differing effect on individuals' policy congruent behaviour. Apart from that, sociological factors also have bearing on how a particular policy is implemented (Weaver, 2009).

In a study conducted by Garcia (2023) in Philippines examining the key aspects related to the distribution of special educational teachers (SPET) and receiving teachers, their awareness of inclusive education policies, their practices, and the barriers they face. The study aimed to assess policy awareness on various legal bases concerning inclusive education; to describe teachers' current practices in handling, modifying, and teaching learners with disabilities and to identify barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education. The study used a descriptive method of research to describe the characteristics of the phenomenon, situation, or population. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to describe problems with little relevant information. This method elicited teachers' responses regarding their awareness of inclusive education policies, current practices, and barriers they faced in dealing with them.

Data was collected from 91 respondents who have firsthand knowledge and lived experiences with inclusive schools located in Quezon City. Metro Manila, Philippines. The findings indicated that SPET and receiving teachers had limited teaching experience but possessed a good understanding of almost all policies on inclusive education except for the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples (ICCs and IPs), indicating a potential area for focused education and awareness-building. Moreover, SPET and receiving teachers consistently observed current practices in admission, teaching, and modifying learning packages for learners with special needs. The overarching barriers to implementing Inclusive Education (IE) in the division were the lack of training among teachers handling special education (SPED), lack of collaboration among key stakeholders, inadequate funding, and physical barriers. This research therefore examined the OSS

COORDINATORS awareness of the admission policy and whether there potential misgivings that divides policy and practice as portrayed in the Garcia's study.

Rouse (2011) highlights that policy awareness purpose is to facilitate policy, rule compliance and allow for accountability for noncompliance. However, Sandikonda (2013) discovered that there are administrative differences within schools of different categories in Malawi. He observed that CDSSs have weaker structures that support the teaching and learning transaction as compared to district secondary schools. More particularly, the admission into district secondary school is more controlled than in CDSSs, hence the study is seated around these premises to understand admission practice of OSSs hosted in these two categories of schools. Holmberg (2008) also argues that the internal administrative systems and organizations found practical in traditional schools are to a very limited extent suitable for open schools, hence this study scrutinized admission practices in both OSS contexts to gauge the admission policy awareness and its palpability in the implementation stage.

Policy awareness needs to be carefully planned for to avoid implementer's misunderstanding of a particular policy message and haphazard implementation of the policy. Training of policy implementers plays a crucial role in enhancing policy awareness by educating individuals about organisational guidelines, legal frameworks, and ethical standards (Mi, Lu & Ciu, 2021). It ensures that implementers understand and comply with the policy thereby promoting a culture of transparency and accountability within the organisation. Mi, et al (2021) recognise training as a platform for policy support intention is garnered where the policy narrative and understanding are perpetually communicated to the policy implementers.

Majone and Wildavsky (1979) pointed out that the coercive approach to policy implementation and regulation enforcement is vulnerable to target populations' insufficient policy interpretation due to cognitive limitations and inadequate policy commitment. To gain policy support from target populations, nowadays, researchers and practitioners have turned to the narrative approach that functions as a communication strategy of policymakers to influence the way that target populations interpret and make sense of a policy (Jones 2014; McBeth et al. 2017). In formal academic terms, a policy narrative is a story that uses characters, a plot, and a moral to construct reality revolving around a particular policy issue (Stone 2002). Different narratives of the same policy issue may highlight different constructions of reality (McBeth, Lybecker, and Stoutenborough 2016). When individuals are exposed to the narrative story, they are transported into the story, become involved with the protagonists, "get lost" in the story, and accept the constructed facts (Jones 2014). And eventually, the individuals are persuaded by the narrative message. Arising from this string of literature is a view of policy implementation not making rational appeals to the public to support the policy, but rather using language and symbolic power, as well as some social construction and storytelling skills to influence the attitudes and opinions of target populations towards the public problems at hand and the solutions to be adopted (Jones and Song 2014; Merry 2018; Van Gerven 2019).

Inspections are also vital and instrumental in verifying and enforcing policy adherence. By regularly assessing compliance, inspections help reinforce awareness, identify gaps and ensure that a policy is effectively implemented in an organisation. Inspections offer a platform for proactive clarifications and communication, leadership commitment, regular opportunities for policy implementers to discuss and evaluate the value performance of a particular policy and engagement of all public

servants and employees of partner organisations, especially through non-monetary incentives (OECD, 2019). While prescriptive checklists are not an appropriate mechanism for reducing inconsistency, inspections provide regular feedback to the policy goals, implementers and the regulators (OECD, 2014). In case of serious non-compliance, inspected entities are provided with clear indications on what the problems are and guidance on how to address them both directly in the concluding discussion and in writing. Additionally, making the inspection results public can be a powerful incentive for compliance for it is likely to increase the reputation of policy operators with high ratings and conversely harm the profitability of organisations with poor compliance (OECD, 2014).

The nature of admission in PSS is not holistically only based on the policy checklist but it is also protected by an in-built system that ensures students' eligibility to be admitted into a particular level of secondary school. PSSs are provided with lists of eligible students from the ministry of education while in OSS, students are obliged to register at an OSS of their liking (MCDE, 2017). OSS coordinators for individual schools are therefore tasked to crosscheck the students' credentials in respect to admission requirements as prescribed by the ministry (MoEST, 2014). This discrepancy in the mode of admission of students in OSS means the coordinators are exposed to different socio-economic influences and forces. As Matzkin and Sustain (2018) found that even in the context of policy judgments, people are affected by the majority opinion in significant ways. So if the majority opinion proves to be otherwise contrary to what the policy stipulates, compliance is intermittent (Matzkin et al 2014). Hence, this study was conducted to explore how admission is conducted in OSS and whether training and inspections are done to perpetuate policy awareness and conformity.

2.2.2 *The admission policy implementation in OSS*

Open Secondary Schools came into existence in 1998 in response to high demand for formal secondary school education (Yates, 2002). Since then OSS numbers have been growing due to increase of students who fail to secure a place in the mainstream system (Chimpololo, 2010; MCDE, 2017 & Gwede, 2014). Contrary to the principles of open distance learning (World Bank 2002, MCDE 2023), students of open schools are taught as in the formal schools (Siaciwena, 1999). The World Bank (2002) also agrees that although there are new approaches to the implementation of new strategies for access to education, the conventional ways of teaching continue to flourish. However, the admission practice in PSS and OSS is different. In PSS, admission is centrally regulated where as in OSS admission is done by almost autonomous individual school administrators (MoEST, 2014).

Furthermore, the African Development Fund (2001) found that the management skills of most secondary schools heads, deputy heads and heads of departments are seriously lacking. It was noted that about 10% of school managers, all of them from Conventional Secondary Schools, had received training in school management aimed at making schools effective. This is echoed by Gwede (2014) that there is lack of qualified teaching, media production and administrative personnel in Malawi's Open schooling. Sandikonda (2013) also found that the admission policy was implicitly implemented which leaves a lot of stakeholders in the dark as to how admission into secondary schools is conducted. Anderson (2004:21) backs this by stating that "the elites may act out of narrow self-serving motives and risk undermining mass support or may initiate reforms, curb abuses and undertake public regarding programmes to preserve the system and their place in it".

This therefore creates a gap in terms of understanding the admission policy intention. The subtle inception of the policy coupled with lack of trained personnel in the ranks of OSS contexts generates a fertile area for many interpretations of the policy. Thus, the study delved into two OSSs hosted by secondary schools of different categories namely community day secondary school and district conventional secondary school to gauge if there have been changes in terms of awareness over the years and how that knowledge is transferred to and implemented in OSS.

Aside that, reinforcement of policies in Malawi education also proves to be a daunting task. Kadzamila and Rose (2001) observe that without donor exertion of influence, most policies in Malawi would not achieve considerable outcomes due to weak organization structures. For instance in primary education there is always congestion due to admission of under- and over-age children which is contrary to the stipulated enrolment age of 6 – 13 of the primary school cycle (JICA, 2012). Thus, in 2001 the African Development Fund suggested that CDSS managers need to undergo training to build their capacity required for improving the effectiveness of the schools. Likoye (2017) reverberates this observation that the progress made in achieving the desired quality and relevance of alternative education pathways remains affected by lack of clarity in the policy instruments, lack of clarity in transition mechanisms, unqualified teachers who often employ inappropriate methods, lack of teaching and learning materials, lack of quality assurance mechanisms, and un-coordinated large number of service providers. In line with these observations, the autonomy over administrative activities (including admission of students) enjoyed by OSS coordinators seemingly presents a weaker implementation framework of the admission policy standards. Hence the study examined the admission practices in OSS and how they are informed by the policy stipulations.

The Malawi government instituted admissions policy for secondary schools to contain the pressure for places in secondary schools (Sandikonda, 2013 & Ngware, Boukary, Wekulo, Mutisya, Zikani, Otieno, & Riechi, 2018). The Ministry of Education (2023) reports that out of 267,330 candidates who sat for the PSLCE in 2023, 234,644 passed and were eligible for secondary school, but only 41 percent of those (96,101 students) secured spots in public secondary schools. Private schools accepted only another 9 percent 23,667 students. For public schools, students are admitted into three categories of secondary education which are grant-aided, conventional and community day secondary schools. The OSS is another category that admits students who fail to secure places in the aforementioned categories of public schools (MoEST, 2016).

Sandikonda (2013) further reveals that elites in Malawi came up with the policy to have their wards attain the best education from either the grant aided secondary schools or the district conventional secondary schools (CSS) through the use of the admissions policy. The Community Day Secondary Schools were meant to serve the children of parents from the lower social strata (Sandikonda, 2013). Additionally, the OSSs also play the latter role as they are meant to provide secondary education to those who fail to access space in public secondary schools and those who fail to pay school fees in elite private schools (Chimombo, Meke, Zietlyn, and Lewin, 2014). Apparently, the school enrolment of private secondary school was reported to be 10.23% out of the total percentage of secondary schools in Malawi (World Bank, 2022) Further to this, most private secondary schools appear to have no admission requirements except the ability to pay admission and tuition fees. Academic performance, gender or age does not entirely seem to be selection criteria for private schools (Chimombo, et. al, 2014).

To curb such trends that were set by the elite in the Malawian education system there is need for a vibrant train of changes to the policy itself. This is evident in the English schools where implementation of their admission policy was not a start stop thing but rather continuous process that responds to various inequities disturbing proper functioning of the policy in question. Coldron, Allen and West (2010) carried out a research, which investigated whether changes to the School Admissions Code in 2003 and 2007 concerning school admission arrangements have had any discernible effect on the social composition of English secondary schools. In the study they addressed the following issues. Firstly, they observed that Schools differed widely in the social composition of their intakes meaning that children from more affluent families tended to be educated separately from those less affluent. Secondly, the children of poorer parents tended to go to schools that performed less well. This suggested that poorer parents had unequal access to good schools partly because of covert and explicit selection by schools. For these reasons admissions had been increasingly subject to regulation by successive Codes.

Methodologically, the research linked data from three surveys of secondary school admissions to all available years of the National Pupil Database (NPD). The surveys gave them a snap-shot of arrangements in use prior to the 2003 Admissions Code, immediately following the implementation of the 2003 Code and following the implementation of the 2007 Code. They calculated changes in the free school meals eligibility (FSM), the school's prior attainment profile and the proportion of white British ethnicity pupils at the school for the years 2001/2 to 2009/10. In the analysis the study investigated the relationship between schools that used inadmissible admissions criteria and changes in school composition over the given period that was analysed.

The changes in the admission policy were responding to the admission trends by schools that admitted students covertly and independently. This practice perpetuated homogenous composition of students in the schools either from same religious background, white British ethnicity and or social composition in terms of affluence. The key findings of the study were that, the 2003 and 2007 School Admissions Codes appeared to have been at least in part responsible for changes in social composition of pupils at schools with criteria and arrangements that were subsequently deemed inadmissible. These relationships still held once they had controlled for changes in neighbor-hood composition. Contrary to expectations, school type was not strongly associated with change in composition. However, a significant number of the schools experiencing very large changes in composition were foundation or voluntary-aided and responsible for their own admissions.

Considering that in Malawi, OSS admissions are done by the individual schools independently, this study delves into the schools' admission practice to understand discrepancies therein, with what the admission policy stipulates. The study may also forge insights as to how the policy can be adjusted to ascertain the required standards in the admission practice.

Mostly, registering in OSS is a last resort to attain secondary education for most students, hence this study aimed to find out if admission requirements were followed in the OSS pertaining to the fact that the admission policy provides for students' eligibility for a particular level based on their performance at the national examinations results. The NEP priority area 2 and the MCDE mandate are clear on the prerequisite qualifications a student is supposed to possess before being admitted into the next academic level (MoEST, 2016). Weaker or lack of regulatory structures

in OSS and lack of donor influence drew bearing for this study where admission practices in OSS were to be examined. Pertaining to the fact that the research was to be carried out at two OSSs hosted at a CDSS and district secondary school, finding out the level of awareness of the policy in question was primary. This is so, because a good understanding of a directive or policy shapes the practices of different units in the implementation stage of the policy.

Nevertheless, for Lane (1987) policy implementation has double meaning: that is to give practical effect to or execute on the one hand, and fulfil or accomplish on the other hand. With this, there is ambiguity in the notion of implementation. On the one hand, implementation is viewed as an end state or policy achievement, and on the other, implementation as a process or policy execution. This ambiguity is furthered in the notion of the overarching NEP's goal of providing access to quality education and the regulation of admission of students in the OSS context. The central figures in implementation are the administrators in the agencies charged with putting a paper policy into action (Heinemann et.al, 2002). Thus, it was important for this study to dwell on the OSS coordinators' understanding of the admissions policy since they operate almost autonomously in most administrative issues of their institutions.

Barnet (2018) also notes that the implementation of policies in Malawi Education is mostly top-down, and it is not clear on the extent to which the plans inform one another from the bottom up. For example, district education plans and school improvement plans are expected to address national policy priorities but there is no formal mechanism for the school plan to inform the district plan and so on. Thus, if not for donor commitment (Car-Hill, Rolleston, Pherali, Schendel, 2015), policy directives in education are mostly safeguarded by established government systems as

evidenced in PSS concerning how the admission endeavour is regulated. However in OSS, the administrative loopholes are farfetched (Ng'ambi, 2010; Gwede, 2014; Munyimbiri, 2014 & Ngware et al, 2018), and the admission practice in the schools needed scrutiny due to the decentralized nature of administrative decisions therein. Furthermore, the extent to which there is coherence across the policy directive and particularly, a shared understanding of what access to quality education constitutes is one contestation this research is to explore.

2.3 Considerations in policy implementation

Policy implementation entails a process of putting into action government or organization policy through translating the goals and objectives into concrete actions, procedures and programs (Dye, 2013). This involves allocating resources, establishing procedures, assigning responsibilities and monitoring progress to ensure that the policy achieves the intended outcomes. Lindblom (1959) recognizes that policy implementation is not a straightforward action rather it is messier that it introduces imperfections as policy ideals are put into action. Various scholars concur with Lindblom that policy implementation is a complicated process because of various contextual factors that can derail otherwise ideal implementation practices or can lead to policies emerging in ways that differ considerably from the intentions of the original author (Smith & Katikireddi, 2013, Singe, 2013; Winter, 2011; Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983 and Pressman & Wildavsky 1973).

Hence according to Okoroma (2006), an effective policy implementation plan needs to identify the problems that arise due to the gaps that exist between policy formulation and implementation which include: over-estimation of available resources; under-estimation of the costs of implementing a plan; over-reliance upon external assistance; and inaccurate statistical data. Plans that do not adequately

provide for this usually have implementation problems. Furthermore, Van Horn and Van Meter (1977) have also advanced three general explanations for unsuccessful implementation of programs, namely: the communication process, the capability problem and dispositional conflicts. Effective implementation requires that implementers know what they are expected to do; as messages pass through any communication network, distortions are likely to occur which can produce contrary directives, ambiguities, inconsistencies and incompatible requirements. Ability to implement policies may be hindered by such factors as incompetent staff, insufficient information, political support, inadequate financial resources and impossible time constraints, and implementation of a policy may fail because those charged with the responsibility of implementation refuse to carry out their assignments.

This, therefore points in the direction of what to consider when implementing a policy of which Signe (2013) outlines that goals and objectives of the policy must be clearly defined to ensure alignment with desired outcomes. In an education setting students, parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers must be engaged in the development and implementation to ensure buy-in and support. Resource allocation, provision of training and professional development opportunities for implementers, development of mechanisms for assessment and evaluation of the policy practice, communication and transparency, flexibility and adaptability, monitoring and accountability as well as continuous improvement enhance the successful implementation of the policy and improve outcomes for all stakeholders (Bloom, Lin, & Wu, 2014; Pressman & Wildasky, 1984; Hogwood & Gun, 1984 and Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979).

Since Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) suggest that the achievement of policy objectives is 10% policy design and 90% implementation, hence vertical participation

in the implementation must be emphasized (Signe, 2013). Zhan (2014) notices that there is an inherent problem with a governance framework that combines centralized political authority with decentralized administration, in which central officials may have unchallenged authority but lack the institutional and organizational means to ensure that their decisions are fully implemented. On the other hand West (2005) echoes that a lack of stakeholder participation in rulemaking creates implementation difficulties. All this hindsight, where there is no vertical participation and interaction in the power hierarchy of policy formulation and implementation leads to difficulties in concretizing the outcomes (Signe, 2013).

2.3.1 Primary considerations of admission in secondary schools

There is scant literature on the subject of admission in OSS but in the realm of open learning and distance education in higher learning, Holmberg (2005) observes that the term “open” at British Open University originally referred to access and the avoidance of certain restrictions. Gourley & Lane, (2009) also emphasise that at the Open University UK, the true meaning of “open” is that, “the institution has no barriers to entry; no entry requirements but only exit standards; a person’s background and previous advantage or disadvantage is entirely irrelevant”. As for secondary schools, the literature for primary considerations when admitting students concerns public secondary schools and private schools. In PSS admission is automatically regulated by structures put in place. Sandikonda (2013) notes that the admission policy of secondary students into Malawian secondary schools is done by the ministry because once the divisional committee of selection has classified the students into the cream [best students], the second best group and the last lot [average and weak students] the purpose of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology is to endorse and announce the results. Consequently, those who fail to make it into the PSS due to

limited space, opt to continue secondary education in OSS and private schools. As for private schools, Chimombo, et al (2014) concludes that admission is based on the capability to pay admission and tuition fees by their clientele.

In the context of this stratification of students in terms of ability, Rumble and Koul (2007) carried out a research in open schooling for secondary and higher education in Namibia. The study was based on the belief that open schooling may offer a potential solution to the looming crisis in the provision of places at secondary education level. They shared the belief that given the cost of setting up conventional schools, open schooling may be the only way of meeting what the Commonwealth of Learning anticipates. Open schooling will cater for a tidal wave of youngsters demanding access to secondary education.

They explained that: firstly, it may be noted that open schooling was seen as a non-formal and more importantly a parallel alternative system vis-à-vis the day schooling system (called the formal system). Secondly it aimed at target groups that had remained neglected that far, promising them equivalent (to that available in the formal system) education. And thirdly, it perceived itself as an operational tool that could solve the problems of access, equity and quality in educational dispensation in the country (Rumble and Koul, 2007, p.105)

However, they established that motivation of adult students in the face of family and work related pressures as a challenge. The other challenge was that some adults had no interest in taking an examination; rather they just wanted to study the course. Given such a scenario, their findings suggested a gap in the implementation of certain strategies, initiatives and even policies. The idea of students, not taking exams has implications on the implementation of the admission policy. Similarly, Perceiving the

open schools as non-formal is a big challenge on its own as Bray (2008), explains that open day schools are usually considered less desirable by most of the headmasters, as such administrative activities like staff meeting, rehearsals for main school and other activities are done in the afternoons, thereby disturbing the lessons for the open schools.

Further to this scholars like Orkodashvilli (2009); Bray (2008); and Klassen (2010) argue that open schooling can be a source of social exclusion within the education sector. They purport that the existence of a differentiated school system can be a source of social exclusion, particularly if the system works largely on a hierarchical basis forcing the students with least educational promise into lower tier while others in the higher tier system. Gropello (2006) shares similar views with these writers by saying that educational inequity that may be manifested in open schooling can be devastating for those youth and families that fall victim to it. He notes that greater educational inequity contributes to greater internal inefficiency to the education system and the country at large. In the Malawian context open school students are even denied a chance to be within the school campus before the time of starting their lessons for fear of causing indiscipline with the conventional students (Munyimbiri, 2014). Ultimately these perceived discrepancies between the main school and open schooling have a bearing on the administrative discourse of the schools which was the interest of this research in as far as admission practice in OSS is concerned.

In between the axis of establishing OSS admission policy level of awareness on the part of administrators and their primary considerations when admitting students lies a lot of destabilizing factors. The question that lurks is whether the policy gets implemented or not due to the absence of the admission central mechanism as in PSS. As in private schools, all open school management falls under the jurisdiction of

managers of the host schools (MoEST, 2014 and Chimombo, et al 2014). This indicates that there are administrative discrepancies in terms of admission between PSS and OSS which in one way or another can affect primary considerations in the admission practice.

There are also several key issues to this from the top level of ODL planning up to the bottom level where the actual teaching and learning transaction happens. Siaciwena (1999) notes that there is inadequate, or at least, varying financial resources from national governments that are inclined to destabilize both planning and operational stages at critical phases of development. This is echoed by Gwede (2014) that there is a lack of qualified teaching, media production and administrative personnel in Malawi's Open schooling. Chimpololo (2010) also notes that in Malawi the area of ODL remains critically underfunded with a meagre 0.3% of the total education budget allotted to MCDE (the main public ODL provider) in the 2009/10 national budget. Inadequate financing from most SSA governments towards alternative education pathways (like OSS in Malawi) perpetuates deficiencies in teacher training, curriculum implementation and use of appropriate pedagogical methods (Ngware, et al 2018). This means the MCDE is unable to train its staff including teacher coordinators due to financial constraints. As such, these difficulties do have a bearing on the administrative tasks that deal with the required admission intricacies since fee collection plays a crucial role in the schools' funding.

Mayeku and Florence (2011) further observed that "coordinated management structures are absent for open and distance education programs and most of them have been launched with the specific function of generating funds for the institution" (p. 368). In Malawi through the OSS, teachers earn extra income to support their daily lives (Kadzamila, 2006 & Chimombo, 2014) since teachers are less rewarded than in

other Sub Sahara African countries (Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2017). Marty (2014) reverberates this assertion that institutional culture and values have changed in open and distance education institutions as provision has moved from a civil-servant-based and education-as-a-public-good frame of reference to a more business or “monetized” approach. Hence, registration of students in open schools can be affected as teachers may tend to maximize their earnings as is the case in private schools where the ability to pay is primary. Likewise, Ngware et al (2018) reveal that the open secondary school centres are run on a private basis by a group of teachers with the school receiving a portion of the income generated as cost contribution for teaching and learning resources used and payment for utility bills.

Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) also found that places of policy implementation also include new units of analysis such as “teacher networks” and “communities” among implementers. In this case, the OSS administrators' relations are integral in affecting the admission practice since there is no strong regulatory framework of the policy as is the case in PSS. Honig, (2009) correspondingly agrees with this assertion by positing that such non-legislated associations or units operate as powerful influences on implementers' work and are more pronounced, especially in the contexts of almost autonomous implementers or administrators. In examining implementers' fidelity to policy designs, Pressman & Wildavsky, (1984) also established that implementers rarely carried out the policies as designed by their hierarchical superiors. Some researchers traced the root causes of these failures to conflicts between policymakers' and implementers' interests, and implementers' overall lack of capacity and will to carry out those instructions (Murphy, 1971; Derthick, 1972; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). Hence the monetized approach, apart from other influences, could primarily be considered since private schools do the

same (Chimombo, et al, 2014) and Malawian teachers' financial incentives are minimal as compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries (Kayuni, et al, 2007).

However, study reports on OSS are devoid of evidence to this effect, probably because, as argued by Bray (2007), researchers exploring administrative systems face several difficulties that discourage their efforts as institutions tend to keep a tight lid on their financial data limiting to gain concrete information. On top of that, one understanding of open learning is that there is no requirement for students' prerequisite knowledge and qualifications (Race, 1989; Ferguson, 1975). Similarly, Siaciwena (1999) questions how we can ensure that open schooling is cost-effective while maintaining the principles of "open admission" which is sometimes associated with high failure rates, in open schools. In dealing with this, the OSSs in Malawi require prerequisite qualifications for eligible students to be admitted into a particular level (MoEST, 2013).

This research therefore examined the admission practices in the OSS as per the provided standards of priority area 2 in the NEP and the MCDE mandate. Establishing primary considerations when admitting students into the OSS provides the study with regulators' understanding of the policy in question, and possibly it provides a window through which regulatory authorities play their role. Since the OSS is also a platform that provides a second chance to out-of-school youths (OOSY) in Malawi, it is imperative to look at how similar programs are supported or funded in other Sub-Saharan African countries. Ngware et al (2018) observe that the second chance for out-of-school youth programs have differing delivery and funding mechanisms ranging from projects funded by NGOs to government programs, as well as full-fledged private programs. Reference is made to the Part-Time Continuing Education

(PTCE) program in Zimbabwe, the Springboard Humanism (SBH) project in Botswana, the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), and the Open Day Secondary School (ODSS) in Malawi.

The Zimbabwe PTCE was initially funded and delivered as a pilot program with funding from Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) but using existing government edifices to ensure that the program is enthralled by the government after showing impact. Like PTCE, the Botswana SBH is also run as an NGO-funded project that sources funds from the founders and private donors, as well as material support from Barclays Bank and the Lady Khama Charitable Trust (Khudu-Petersen and Mabvuta, 2016). The NAMCOL is run as a semi-autonomous educational institution with funding from the government that is complemented by income generated through fees paid by enrolled youths.

On the other hand, the ODSS in Malawi is self-sponsored through fees collected from youths enrolled in the program at each learning centre (Ngware et al, 2018). The ODSS, however, utilizes government structures, government-employed teachers, teaching and learning resources available at learning centres (which are mostly government secondary schools). The fees collected from learners are used to pay teachers for hours engaged in teaching the youths as well as contributing to some costs incurred by the hosting school for the use of available teaching and learning resources as well as utility bills (Chimombo et al, 2014). These differing models of funding can have a bearing on what primary considerations should be in the admission practice.

2.4 The role of regulatory authorities in the admission policy

2.4.1 Regulator's practices in policy enforcement

Regulation can mean the formal and informal rules, norms and sanctions that work together to shape people's behaviour or interactions in pursuit of a broad goal or outcome (Allen and Clark, 2021). Regulation can also mean the rules by which governing institutions impose obligations or constraints on the way something is done or the way people behave (OECD, 2008). Kjaer & Vetterlein (2018) observe that the study of regulation is mainly concerned with the processes of emergence, implementation, monitoring, contesting or avoiding regulation and the sanctioning of non-compliance.

This means that the regulator is responsible for enforcing policies set by governing bodies, ensuring compliance with norms, laws and regulations within their respective organisation. Regulators are inherently policy implementers who offer consumer protection, mediate disputes among stakeholders; issue licences and permits to entities wishing to operate within regulated organisations; as well as establish and maintain standards for safety, quality and performance to protect consumers, businesses and the environment (Hudson, Hunter & Peckham, 2019). Above all regulators have the authority to enforce penalties, fines, or other sanctions against entities or individuals found in violation of regulatory requirements. They are also considered policy developers because they incrementally contribute to the development of new policies and regulations by providing expertise, research and recommendations to governing bodies (Hudson et al, 2019).

For effective regulation, National Audit Office (2021) sums up the roles into a cycle of four important groups of principles that should be followed, namely design, analyse, intervene and learn principles. Under design, the principles are to help

translate the policy intent and purpose of regulation into the design of an overall regulatory framework. The analyse principles are to help regulators and policymakers analyse the market or issue being regulated, and identify and assess where problems are occurring that may require intervention. Where regulators identify problems, the learn principles help them to understand what impact they might have, prioritise actions, and consider how best to respond. Finally the learn principles are to help regulators and policymakers maximise their effectiveness in future by learning from experience and working in a joined-up way with other organisations (National Audit Office, 2021). In essence these highlighted roles and principles are catered for through training of regulators and regulates on capacity building and emerging issues within the policy, and inspections to offer implementation support and assess compliance with regulatory standards of the policy. All these regulatory intricacies are entrusted in regulatory authorities.

2.4.2 Admission regulation in OSS

Scholars now emphasize the independence of regulatory authorities in order to promote regulatory effectiveness, fairness and transparency while fostering innovation, competition and consumer welfare within regulated organisations (Hudson, Hunter & Peckham, 2019; Jakubowski & Szescilo, 2018; OECD, 2014; and Hanretty & Koop, 2012). The MoEST (2016) mandates MCDE to overlook the administrative processes of the OSS. However, scholars have found that the MCDE has many challenges ranging from administrative to financial handicaps (Chimpololo, 2010; Gwede, 2014; & Madziatayika, 2017). Furthermore, the ODeL policy still points to the MCDE as a custodian of admission in OSS where it states that “the OSS students are usually not selected but make it through self and school initiative to register, with support from MCDE” (MoE, 2021, 22). The policy brings up the idea of

making ODeL accessible to all eligible learners at all levels (MoE, 2021). Bearing in mind that the OSS are providers of the secondary level education, this eligibility entails possession of prerequisite qualifications as stipulated in the NEP priority area 2 and MCDE mandate.

Nevertheless, the regulatory processes for such provisions are not clearly put forward as such, individual OSS administrators seem to enjoy the autonomy of decision making as far as admitting students is concerned (MCDE, 2017). Mayeku et al. (2011) note lack of coordination between the responsible stakeholders as a pervading destabilizing factor in the running of ODL in the implementation context. The OECD (2023) further observes that adult learning policies (of which OSSs are part of) are often less effective than they could be due to fragmented institutional responsibilities and a lack of coordination. Coordination efforts across relevant government authorities and stakeholders are therefore crucial to avoid overlapping or incoherent policy efforts (OECD, 2013). Strong vertical governance arrangements can support knowledge transfer, inform budget allocations, target policy to local needs, and help to reduce disparities in adults' participation in learning across regions (OECD, 2023). On the other hand, horizontal coordination guarantees policy stakeholders' consistent approach to, facilitate policy alignment, and delineate responsibilities and realising the policy's normative goal (OECD, 2023). This entails a further probe to how the admission practices are monitored or regulated in respect with the autonomous nature of OSS coordinators and the MCDE's role. Additionally the vertical link between the MCDE and the individual OSSs, and the horizontal coordination of individual OSSs were looked into to get a profound picture how regulation is conducted.

The OECD (2000) also attributes compliance failures to a policy as emanating from lack of regulatory knowledge or comprehension by the target group; non-compliance

related to the willingness of the target group to comply with the rules and non-compliance related to the ability of the target group to comply with the rules. In other words reasons for non-compliance can be found at three different levels at which governments should employ a mix of activities to ensure that its policy will take effect. These are the degree to which the target group knows of and comprehends the rules, the degree to which the target group is willing to comply – either because of economic incentives, positive attitudes arising from a sense of good citizenship, acceptance of policy goals, or pressure from enforcement activities. And lastly, the degree to which the target group is able to comply with the rules (OECD, 2000).

Likewise, Lewin states that people behave based on their perceptions of reality, not on the basis of reality itself (1936). Street-level bureaucrats (implementers) may experience different levels of discretion within the same policy. One possible reason is the possession of more knowledge on (loopholes) in the rule; alternatively, it may be that their organisation operationalized the policy somewhat differently (Brehm & Hamilton, 1996). Another reason could be they have a better relationship with their manager which enables them to adjust themselves to circumstances, or the personality of the implementer is more rule-following or rebellious (Brehm & Hamilton, 1996; Prottas, 1979). Peculiarly, in the realm of admission, OSSs are administered by almost autonomous coordinators hence the study targeted these key figures to understand their take on the policy.

Aside this, failure of administrative capacity is attributed to governments' reliance on good drafting and enforcement practices rather than devoting resources to adequate implementation policies meant to make it feasible for target groups to ably comply with the rules (OECD, 2000). Voluntary compliance levels may be compromised if governments do not ensure that implementation includes the provision of necessary

information and other support or mechanisms. The administrative autonomy enjoyed by OSS coordinators is a case in point that was examined regarding admission practices. In doing so, the research unearthed the roles played by the regulatory authorities of the admission policy and whether there is enforcement mechanism or the policy demands voluntary compliance among other options.

Among the enforcement mechanisms, Ettiene (2010) identifies sanctions as a pertinent aspect of a policy because they carry especially important normative signals to regulatees (implementers) of what is appropriate, or more exactly what is not. This signalling effect of sanctions enables and makes sense of the claim that social norms and deterrence are not independent factors of compliance (Sherman, Smith, Schimdt and Rogan, 1992). In fact, ‘voluntary’ compliance is often correlated to strict controlling and sanctioning practices towards regulatees who do not comply because these punishments signal their normative obligations to the whole target population (Sherman, Reuter, Eck & Bushway, 2006 and Weaver, 2009). Secondly, if sanctions disappear, then the normative goal weakens, and violations of related norms may become widespread (Gezelius, 2002). Also, anything signaling that threats of sanctions are not deterring non-compliers may be perceived as proof that the norm has lost its moral force (Grabosky, 1995; Keizer, Lindenberg and Steg, 2008). With the perceived lack of strong regulatory mechanism, the study delved into the MCDE’s practice and guidelines as to how the admission regulation was enforced in OSS.

Additionally, governments and regulators sometimes rely through habit upon certain types of regulatory instruments to solve problems, without first adequately defining and analysing the particular problem to determine the most appropriate solution (OECD, 2000). Too often, the problem itself is defined as “a lack of regulation”. If a government accurately defines the causes of the problem and clearly defines its policy

objective, the government can then use the least coercive and most effective means to achieve that objective. When used appropriately, command-and-control regulation can provide clarity, certainty, and predictability. Issues of admission stem from the NEP's aspirations to improve access to quality education (MoEST, 2016). The PSS has a definitive admission mechanism and the OSS is there to complement it.

Although it is tempting to conclude that the PSS admission, being centralized, is robust there are gaps as to how sound the system is. This ultimately raises concerns on the decentralized nature of OSS admission. Ng'ambi (2010) observes that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology has a research, monitoring and evaluation unit, whose main duty is to evaluate education programs and make necessary recommendations for their maximum impact. Unfortunately due to staffing and resource constraints, the unit is not performing as anticipated. The unit is yet to develop monitoring and evaluation programs; instead its focus has been on participating in periodic reviews of the MGDS and in joint sector reviews thereby diverging from its main focus (p.6). This shows that the ministry of education cannot identify the problems which are faced by the conventional secondary schools. This being the case it remains automatic that they cannot identify these problems in the open day institutions. If the whole ministry is losing focus on its main duty what of its subsidiaries like the MCDE which according to Chimpololo (2010), Gwede (2014) and Ngware et al (2018), also lacks substantive support framework for implementation of different OSS programs, strategies, directives and even policies. Ng'ambi (2010) also found that the MoEST showed signs of policy overload and implementation fatigue due to constant development of new educational policies, which leaves little time for their implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The OSSs provide space to students who fail to secure space in the PSS. However then, the admission practices which are at the mercy of the coordinator, together with his level of awareness of the policy intricacies had to be looked into. Isaac and Mohee (2020) in their baseline situational analysis on ODL in Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states reported that, although Malawi has National Education Standards which provide framework for quality assurance, enforcement has been quite challenging due to inadequate technical capacity. Probably, the roles played by responsible regulators of the policy somewhat needed scrutiny as to what mechanisms are put in place to safeguard the admission policy standards.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

2.5.1 Goal Framework Theory

The research was guided by Lindenberg's Goal Framing Theory (GFT) developed in 2007 which recognizes that (non-)compliance to policy stipulations is motivated by three goals that are salient at each given moment (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007). The theory postulates that goals "frame" the way people process information and act upon it. It is a theory of individual action that strives to integrate the diversity and plurality of human motivations (Lindenberg et al, 2007). The central idea is that the goals govern or frame what people attend to, what knowledge and attitudes become cognitively most accessible, how people evaluate various aspects of the situation, and what alternatives are being considered.

Since the admission of students in OSS is not centralised as in PSS, the GFT was used to give this study an insight as to what comes into play when OSS administrators are implementing the admission policy. The theory recognises that there are three main goals namely Normative, Hedonic, and Gain goal frames. The normative goal represents what the admission policy postulates hence the policy implementers'

attitudes and actions are expected to benefit the organisation. Its goal-frame activates sub-goals associated with appropriateness which makes people especially sensitive to what they think one ought to do. This helped the researcher to uncover admission practices related to GFT conceptualization and the systemic and contextual factors that rendered the practices effective or not. In PSS the admission policy implementing context seems to be strong as opposed to the OSS context where the admission of students is done by the coordinator. In a normative goal-frame, improvement is related to group goals not with the way one feels and with personal resources. In some situations, it is contributing to a joint project legitimately, or achieving a public goal, or conforming to the group norms.

On the other hand, when the hedonic goal is salient, it activates one or more sub-goals that promise to improve the way one feels in a particular situation. The frame sharpens the sensitivity towards opportunities for need satisfaction and towards events that affect the way one feels (Lindernberg, 2008). Policy implementers may push aside the normative goal because they are naturally not rule-following or they would want to feed their ego for psycho-social gains. Lastly, a gain goal frame activates sub-goals having to do with resources such as saving money, increasing one's income, and dealing with threats to one's financial security. Sub-goals having to do with the way one feels and with normative behaviour, are not considered. In the context of this study, the policy implementer may evade the normative goal in order to benefit financially. Salience of these two frames is inevitable since Lindenberg (2022) further argues that, even in the case of a well-designed goal frame, some obstacles can impede the effectiveness of implementing the policy. Hence using this theory, the study equally benefitted from the perceptions of host school head teachers, OSS coordinators, MCDE official, MoEST official, and students regarding such factors.

So these goal frames are salient at any given moment where they can displace each other or compete for the implementer's urgency when a policy has a weak regulatory framework. Choice probabilities for a goal must not be equally distributed because it would make choice unpredictable and behaviour random thereby reverberating competition between goals for the actor's attention. Thus, an organization needs to align the normative goals with the departments' and individuals' goal (Lindenberg, 2022) to minimise competition for the implementers' attention.

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter a number of issues have been discussed. These comprised related literature on issues around implementation and issues in respect to the specific objectives of the study as well as the theoretical framework that has been engaged in the study. Various scholars have been engaged to provide a critical perspective to the main aim and subsequent objectives of the study. The chapter also highlighted gaps such as administrative flaws in the education sector and how they subsequently affect administration of ODL in Malawi, specifically the admission practice. Related literature reviewed revealed that the admission policy was an elitist tool which led to deep-rooted stratification of secondary schools. This then disadvantages the CDSSs and OSSs (which are in the lower rung of the stratification) in terms of distribution of resources for administrative stamina. The policy implementation literature engaged, put into perspective the need for examining the policy practice divide, if present, in OSS. This was done to unearth the discrepancies in OSS admission practice and possibly direct the study to suggest solutions.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the research methodology. It discusses the research design, sampling technique, data generation procedures and methods, ethical issues, and limitations of the study.

3.2 Research Approach

The study was conducted using the qualitative research design more specifically the phenomenology research inquiry to examine the admission practices in OSS. This research inquiry is best served to meet the research objectives. The open secondary schools at a rural zone Community Day Secondary and urban zone District Secondary School were engaged to examine the practices therein as regards their conformity to the NEP's and MCDE mandate's admission stipulations. The chapter will discuss the research paradigm, research design, data generation, and data analysis approaches.

3.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with 'ultimates' or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 107). The type of paradigm espoused determines the choice a

researcher makes regarding research questions and instruments, as well as data generation and analysis procedures. Best and Kahn (2006) state that research methodologies can be divided into two major paradigms, namely: logical-positivism and phenomenological inquiry. According to Best and Kahn (2006), whereas the logical-positivistic paradigm utilizes experimental research designs, phenomenological inquiry (also known as interpretivism) uses a variety of interpretivist research methods.

This study was guided by the interpretivism paradigm in the sense that it sought to understand how OSS stakeholders construct their reality in response to the NEP's aspiration of providing access to quality education and the implementation of admission standards. The study aimed to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the policy stakeholders in light of the admission policy. It sought to understand how the implementing agents made sense of the policy in their world. Interpretivism emphasizes the importance of context and the researcher's interaction with the subjects in order to interpret and understand the meaning behind human behaviors, actions and interactions (Pervin & Mokhta, 2022), which in this case hovered around OSS admission practice. It also seeks to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of people to uncover how individuals make sense of their world. Creswell (2009) notes that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. Thus, this study gained information from multiple sources to establish the meanings attached to the admission policy and its relation to access to secondary

education.

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Design

Cresswell (2009) defines Qualitative research as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It allows people's experiences to be examined in detail, and for this study, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to enable the researcher to identify the different aspects of admission practices. Particularly, this study used the phenomenological strategy to identify the procedures through which the OSS admission practice develops. Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants (Cresswell, 2009). Understanding lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

Hence, the study delved into the OSSs to describe the admission phenomena since the coordinators seem to have full discretion on administrative processes, unlike their counterparts in public schools. The schools selected were examined from various dimensions as to how they relate to and interact with their environment since open school admission seems not to be regulated centrally as in the mainstream public secondary schools. Thus, information was sourced from the Ministry of Education, MCDE, two head teachers, two open school administrators, and students to gain an in-depth understanding of the admission practice.

The research involved two OSSs hosted by a CDSS and a boarding conventional secondary school in the South East Education Division in order to appreciate the

administrative discrepancies highlighted by Sandikonda in 2013. The study further meant to observe whether the discrepancies are reflected in the OSSs. The study also intended to check if proximity to regulatory authorities could factor in a particular OSS's compliance to the admission hence the research was done in the rural zone CDSS and an urban zone conventional secondary school.

The strategy helped to unearth how the OSS coordinators understand the policy of admission and the nature of how it is supposed to be implemented. This brought to the fore the experiences and perceptions of the OSS coordinators which allowed this study to inform, support, or challenge policy and action. Further to this, the interaction between the relevant stakeholders was looked into through interviews with the MoEST and MCDE officials. They were engaged to establish the processes and roles taken by respective stakeholders that ensure compliance with the admission policy aspirations. As such this approach helped to illuminate or draw attention to recurring themes as to how the admission policy is implemented in open secondary schools. Notably, phenomenological studies make detailed comments about individual situations that do not lend themselves to direct generalization (Lester, 1999). Hence the final narrative of this study was drawn from the aforementioned sources and how they interplay in the admission phenomenon.

3.4 Study Sample

The study sample comprised twenty two (22) respondents, four (4) interviewees of which are the admission policy implementing officers; two (2) are regulatory officials from the ministry and MCDE; and finally sixteen (16) students were involved in a focus group discussion. The primary key informants of this study were the host school headmasters, OSS coordinators who are the policy implementing officers, and the policy regulators which included the MCDE and Ministry of Education officials

responsible for admission. Finally, Form 1 and Form 3 open secondary school students were drawn indiscriminately from each school's population for a focus group discussion. The forms chosen are entry points for a particular level of secondary education as prescribed in the NEP.

3.5 Sampling

The study engaged purposive sampling which particularly targeted the policy implementing officers and regulatory authority officers (host school headteachers, OSS coordinators, an MCDE official responsible for ODL research and the MoEST official responsible for new educational initiatives and policy). Participation was largely determined by the policy-implementation role one holds in the OSS admission context. An FGD was also conducted with students whose responses were meant to validate and triangulate the interviewees' (key policy implementers) responses. Students' selection was random hence gender was not of interest during the research.

The research involved one school in the Zomba Rural Education zone and another in the urban education zone. This was purposively to generate data perspectives from a rural CDSS and an urban district boarding conventional secondary school. Bernard (2002) posits that purposive sampling is a key informant technique wherein one or a few individuals are solicited to act as guides to a culture. The research involved a sample size of 22 participants. The six key interviewees were two host school head teachers and two OSS coordinators of the respective schools, one official from the MCDE, and one from the South East Education Division in the Ministry of Education. The FGD comprised 16 students where eight Form 1 students and another eight Form 3 students from the respective schools were involved. The students were selected using simple random selection from the respective entry points of junior (Form 1) and senior (Form 3) secondary education.

3.6 Instrument for Data Generation

Interviews were used to establish insights on how administrators in the open school admit students. Furthermore, data from stakeholders responsible for the regulation of the policy in question was generated through interviews and students were also engaged in focus group discussions (FGD) to understand the policy implementation context. Although the interviews offer a wide spectrum of feedback in terms of emotions, feelings and opinions regarding a particular research subject and eliminates non response rates (Fisher, 2005), there is a risk that the interview may deviate from pre-specified research aims and objectives (Gill & Johnson, 2002). Thus an interview guide was prepared to guide the researcher in the study. The phenomenology strategy helped to examine the school's admission practice in its context and it also helped to obtain perceptions towards the admission practices from a variety of sources. **See the appendices** for the instruments prepared to guide the data generation process.

3.7 Data Management and Analysis

The data for this study was generated from the Host school head teachers, OSS coordinators, OSS students, MCDE, and MoEST officials responsible for regulating admission practices. It was processed and analysed using computer aided thematic analysis, which requires coding the responses and observations and tabulating the data (Kothari, 2004). The data was transcribed and reflected upon where repeated patterns were organized into codes using the Nvivo computer software. The software generated codes were then interpreted into broader predominant themes from the transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions. The themes were then used in the final analysis by the researcher upon careful reflection and thought for the interpretation of the data thereby coming up with meanings and understandings as to how admission is practiced and regulated. NVivo provides for rapid coding, thorough

exploration, and rigorous management and analysis of non-numerical unstructured data (Cresswell, 2012). However, when using the software for thematic analysis, care should be taken when coding to avoid errors and so researchers should always check the reliability of the codes. This is critical in achieving the goals of the project.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

An ethical clearance was issued by the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) and the researcher was inspected by officials from UNIMAREC as the research was in progress. The researcher sought consent by explaining the purpose of collecting data and its use. The respondents were told to participate in the study voluntarily and verbal confirmations were sought to make sure that the participation was on a voluntary basis. All the participants were assured that the information they provided would be kept private and treated as confidential. The research results have been presented anonymously and no participant or school would be identifiable from the report. The researcher tried to remain honest, respectful, and sympathetic towards all the participants since the study had no experimental aspect on a human being. **See appendices** for the ethical clearance, inspection feedback and consent and assent forms.

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

The chapter discussed the research methodology. The study was predominantly qualitative with the use of the phenomenology strategy to gather information about the admission practice in the selected schools. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select the schools and participants of the study. A field notebook and recorder were used in recording the interviews. Content and thematic analysis was done using the Nvivo for coding the information that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents and discusses findings from the study focusing on admission policy and practices in two OSSs hosted in a conventional district secondary school and a community day secondary school from Zomba district. The research questions for the study guide the presentation of the findings and discussions in this chapter.

4.2 Awareness about standard admission in Open Secondary Schools

This part focused on unearthing the nature of awareness about standard admission requirements on the part of OSS implementers as put forth in the National Education Policy and the MCDE mandate.

4.2.1 Requirements for a student to be registered in targeted OSSs

The study found that all the implementers of the open schooling in secondary from the two schools involved in the study through in-depth interviews were aware of the standard admission procedure. The implementers in the host institutions included the two host head teachers and OSS coordinators of the two OSSs. Coordinator 1 admitted that he knew the admission policy but not to the fullest.

I basically base my admission procedure on the way it is done in the mainstream school. Actually I have not gone through what the policy fully stipulates. I just know that when admitting students

they are supposed to present their previous achievement as a requirement. (Interview, Coordinator 1)

The other stakeholders including the regulatory authorities' personnel and the beneficiaries of the policy were also aware of what is required for a student to be admitted into an open school.

The respondents stated that a student is supposed to have passed PSLCE and JCE to get registered into the junior cycle and senior cycle of secondary education respectively. Of the four host school implementers, three showed knowledge that the admission policy was provided for both in the NEP and the MCDE Handbook. Both host head teachers expressed knowledge of the admission policy based on the National Education Policy and the MCDE handbook. Coordinator 1 was aware of the policy through common practice in public secondary schools, whereas Coordinator 2 knew of the policy based on the MCDE Handbook and common practice in public secondary schools.

I have actually read the MCDE handbook a couple of times. I am aware of how background knowledge or rather prerequisite qualifications must be emphasized when admitting students. I mean it's a directive from the ministry, but challenges come in when it comes to fees collection (Interview, Coordinator 2)

The respondents understood where this practice comes from and that it is the ministry's requirement to admit qualified students.

4.2.2 Awareness of the Importance of the Admission policy

The study revealed that all the respondents were aware of the importance of the policy. The respondents reported that demanding for the prerequisite qualification is

in the interest of the Ministry of Education to maintain standards in OSSs. They stated that this promotes access to quality secondary education and it is one corner stone of national education policy in Malawi. This is indicated by both coordinators as follows;

Possession of the prerequisites indicates the history and capabilities that a prospective student has. This helps us in the planning of classroom sessions and how to handle our students (Coordinator 1)

The ministry requires us to comply with the admission policy and ask the students for prerequisite qualifications before admitting them in order to maintain the quality of education in the open schools. However, we sometimes operate as a business and are forced to forego the process due to time constraints (Coordinator 2)

Both host head teachers also affirmed to this:

The qualification acts as an indicator that a candidate has prerequisite knowledge for the next academic level. This makes the teachers' work much easier. The ministry is right to enforce this (admission) policy because it does not only benefit us academically, but we have to bear in mind that it is a state requirement. Students in the main schools are verified before being registered, so why spare the OSS student? The idea is about quality. (Interview, HH1)

Although sometimes the qualifications can be misleading because students' academic progress can change based on other factors, the qualifications help us in the placement process. Plus, students who are qualified tend to be easier to manage because they have background

knowledge in different concepts from their previous level of qualification. (Interview, HH2)

The students understand that the policy makes sure that the students who fail their PSLCE and JCE must not be admitted in the next academic level. They also highlighted that lessons can drag when there are students who do not have background knowledge, hence the need for prerequisite qualification (admission policy). Additionally, Coordinator 1 revealed that when it comes to planning for the students who do not possess the prerequisites, teacher facilitators task themselves to fill the missing gaps through make up classes and a lot of assessments on the presumed gaps.

All the implementing officers including students who are the clients of the policy understand the importance of the admission policy. However, the statement made by Coordinator 1 and HH2 predates factors that lead to manipulation of the policy in practice. Certainly, the policy implementers are not adhering to the policy requirements when discharging their duties because they are influenced by the socio-economic demands in their context of implementation. The idea of having to plan more for under-qualified learners posited by Coordinator 1 and the justification that qualifications can be misleading can influence implementers to disregard the policy direction in the OSS context.

Coordinator 2's comment on the business aspect of OSSs points to what Weaver (2009) terms as behavioural economics perspective. In this view he quotes Thaler and Sunstein (2008) who argue that implementers have a limited capacity to process information, and that biases built into their projections of payoffs from various choices may lead them to make choices that are not optimal, either in terms of their

own self-interest or that of society. In other words, the respondents concede of having knowledge of the policy but do not adhere to it because the policy disadvantages them business wise. In this context, it seems that the hedonic aspects of the goal frame theory (GFT) are manifested. Although the stakeholders are aware of the policy and standard procedure of admission practice, they choose to evade it in order to satisfy their feelings. To opine that qualifications can be misleading reveals how the implementers feel about the policy regarding their socio-economic interests.

Another important view raised in the responses is that of rational choice perspective. This perspective sees implementers as responding rationally to incentives they face in a way that maximizes their self-perceived utility (Weaver, 2009). The respondents are justifying their non-compliance to serve their business interest because they feel their actions are not rewarded appropriately, as such they manipulate the situation to their advantage. The main policy implication of this approach is that it is critical to get the structure of incentives and sanctions right and to monitor and enforce compliance with the policy to ensure that compliance is appropriately rewarded and that non-compliance punished. Thus, Lindenberg (2022) opines that an organization needs to align the normative goals with the departments' and individuals' goal to minimise competition for the implementers' attention.

Becker and Stigler (1974) also contended that the best way to improve compliance is to raise the fine for infractions or to offer a bonus or other monetary incentive for cooperation. However, Etienne (2010) observe that it is of limited value to make such predictions because a variety of empirical studies have shown that punishment or the threat of punishment is a poor explanation for (non-)compliant behaviour. Rather he maintains that mostly for implementers, all motivations besides the maximisation of individual utility are ignored.

Another critical thing is that the admission policy is generally a tool for elites to perpetuate their status at the expense of the masses (Sandikonda, 2013). This means it took a top down approach in its initial implementation where it has perpetually embraced the status quo thus far, and implementation in PSS is controlled centrally. The top down and a bottom up approach are schools of thought for policy formulation and implementation. Top-down models see implementation as concern with the degree to which the actions of implementing officials and target groups coincide with the goals embodied in an authoritative decision (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989). Pulzl and Treib (2007) posit that top-down models put their main emphasis on the ability of decision makers' to produce unequivocal policy objectives and on controlling the implementation stage. Top downers' advice is to make policy goals clear and consistent (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983); minimize the number of actors (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973); limit the extent of change necessary (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983); and place implementation responsibility in an agency sympathetic with the policy's goals (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975; Sabatier, 1986). This is reflected in the admission of students in public secondary schools where a few regulatory organizations collaborate in the admission process to ensure fidelity to the aspirations of the policy. In OSS, the admission practice is carried out by numerous actors whose interest may oppose the admission policy.

On the other hand bottom-up scholars, such as Berman (1978 and 1980); Hjern and Porter (1981); Hjern (1982); Hjern and Hull (1982); Hull and Hjern (1987); and Lipsky (1980) argue that a more realistic understanding of implementation can be gained by looking at a policy from the view of the target population and the service deliverers. Bottom-up critiques view local bureaucrats as the main actors in policy

delivery and conceive of implementation as negotiation processes within networks of implementers (Pulzl and Treib, 2007). In OSSs the coordinators are responsible for what the central system does in PSS which necessitates the need for bottom up approach in the formulation and implementation of the policy. This scenario coupled with more implementers having knowledge of the admission policy rather than as it was before, when only a few school managers especially those in conventional secondary school knew (Sandikonda, 2013); the implementers are now manipulating the situation to their advantage.

Furthermore, admission policy is an administrative policy “whose implementations are basically designed and concluded without a hitch” (Matland, 1995). As is the case in mainstream schools’ admission, where it is centrally facilitated and controlled by the Ministry of Education and the measures of ambiguity and conflict are both minimal. However, the same policy seems to manifest different characteristics in OSSs because the facilitators or implementers are coordinators who may have personal interests in the policy. Apart from that the policy also has to suit the flexible nature of ODL where students’ categories are more diverse than in mainstream schools (MCDE, 2017). Thus Mitra, Mann & Hlavacik (2016) opine that flexibility of policy allows for many changes at once. Greater flexibility allows for creativity and a local sensing mechanism, but prevents equality and predictability. Ambiguity is amplified in situations in which local responses and capacities must vary to respond to a core policy idea (Honig, 2001). In such situations, street-level bureaucrats (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Lipsky, 1980) have the space to create variable practices and procedures in response to policy.

Now the OSS scenario presents the policy as a symbolic policy where the implementation happens when the levels of both conflict and ambiguity are high, and

its success depends on the strength of the coalition of the policy implementers (Matland, 1995). There is an ostensibly implausible combination where salient symbols can produce high levels of conflict when the policy is vague. With or without awareness of the policy outcomes will vary across sites and they will depend upon the balance of local coalition strength. Monitoring of activities becomes difficult due to a high charge of policy ambiguity.

4.3 Admission considerations and Processes in OSS

The process of admitting students as stipulated in MCDE mandate begins with prospective students to identify an OSS of their liking. In the OSS a student chooses to register, the coordinator is mandated to verify whether a student passed the PSLCE before being registered at junior level. At senior secondary levels students are asked to present evidence of their JCE. In this case the OSS coordinator is supposed to verify the authenticity of students' national official documentation, and if the prospective students meet the required standards.

The study however, discovered that the procedure of admission does not adhere to the key demands of the admission policy because of different factors. The respondents revealed that the admission policy is very much of paper work and mostly it is not implemented in OSSs. They cited lack of strong regulatory framework, competition from other unregistered OSSs and private schools and the need for teacher involvement in the OSS as motivating factors of not implementing the policy. In essence this process is not followed as the Coordinator 1 revealed.

Our OSS has been admitting senior secondary students only from its inception which was easier because most of our students were repeating the course. And the abandonment of the JCE in 2016 from the government made it easier to admit the students. It is only now that

we have been asking for the junior certificate after its reintroduction. In terms of junior secondary we are not asking for the PSLCE since we want to garner the numbers of students in our OSS because we have just started now. And we want to deal away with the competition from other OSSs because we know that if we are strict other schools are going to admit them. (Interview, Coordinator 1)

The FGD with students in both schools confirmed that not all junior secondary entrants were asked to bring PSLCE transcripts, tuition and registration fees. One of the OSS2 students had to say:

When I came to register for Form 1, I was asked to come with registration fees and tuition fees only. They did not ask me to bring the testimonial from my previous school. (FGD 2)

Further to this, the FGD in both schools revealed that the students had knowledge of their classmates who did not possess the prerequisite qualifications. Coordinator 1 also revealed that they deliberately did not ask for prerequisite qualifications since it was their first time to register students in Form one. The same was observed by Form three students who attested that, although they were new to each other, chances were high that students without prerequisite qualifications can be registered in the school. This is so because they were not asked to present their certificates or notification of results when they were being admitted.

At OSS2 the Form 3 students expressed knowledge of students who failed the JCE being in their class and some Form 1 students also vaguely admitted that they did not want to repeat Standard 8 because they failed. The students opened up that the admission process was open and some were admitted without being asked the

prerequisites. They said it was a matter of seeking consent from parents and guardians. So, the study found that there are discrepancies between what the policy directs and how the policy is implemented. This showed that there are motivations that discourage compliance to the admissions policy.

Out of the sixteen (16) students interviewed (FGD) in both schools only six (6) students produced their prerequisite qualifications before being admitted in the schools. Notably, the three (3) students who produced the JCE were actually continuing in the same schools which made their entry in Form 3 automatic. There were three (3) repeaters who were not asked for the prerequisite qualifications altogether. There were also two (2) students who did not produce the JCE at entry and they revealed that they were not asked for the prerequisites during admission. Out of the five (5) students who did not produce the Primary school testimonial, only one (1) revealed that she was not asked for the prerequisite, whereas the other four (4) were admitted under the pretext that their OSS was then operating as a business as was revealed by their OSS coordinator.

The research unearthed some competing interests that motivate OSS coordinators not to comply with what the National Education Policy (2022) stipulates as far as admission process is concerned.

4.3.1 Maximizing teachers' financial interest

The study discovered that open schools help to improve the economic status of teachers. The respondents explained that open schools help the teachers to maintain their dignity in the light of meagre and delayed salaries. They further argued that open schools have reduced teacher absenteeism and attrition rate as most of the teachers do not see the reason for leaving the profession because open schools are helping them to make ends meet. One of the open school coordinator added that,

Normally we are supposed to ask for prerequisite qualification when admitting students but we now operate as a business. There are business decisions we make when admitting students in order to boost our finances. Most teachers are stable because of these open schools. So in our catchment area there are a lot of schools that are willing to forego the policy in order to register more students for more financial returns. We do the same, so that teachers can get something more from the open school after two weeks. (Interviews, Coordinator 1)

In general, financial incentives have been found to be a leading motivating factor for the admitting students without asking for the prerequisite qualifications in open schools. Aside teachers pocketing allowances, the host school gets 30% of the collected revenue and the host head teacher also pockets as the highest earning teacher. The MCDE also gets MK500 for every registered student. This ratifies Mayeku and Florence (2011) findings that most ODL programs have been launched with the specific function of generating funds for the institution. Chimombo (2010) further agrees that some open schools operate in secret to the extent that it is very difficult to get the real coverage of the system. Quality aspects in the admission process can also be neglected to satisfy the growing number of teacher facilitators' participation in the OSS.

The respondents revealed that more teachers are now interested in the OSS because it provides them with allowances every fortnight. This may entice admission policy implementers to evade the required standards to increase the number of students admitted in order to serve the growing number of teacher facilitators.

With the way the whole set up is, it is possible for a school to register let's say 100 students and submit only 69 as registered students to the MCDE. This means the remaining number is not accounted for by the authorities. And it can be manipulated where you can register students who are not qualified for a particular level [laughs] though I am not saying we do that here. Plus, it will mean a school will not disburse the registration fee for the remaining students, which means more money for the teachers. (Interviews, Coordinator 2)

This indicates how the system can be manipulated by the implementers for their financial or private gain. These loopholes exacerbate the practice of forgoing the normative goal of the policy which is to verify whether students are qualified to be admitted in a particular level of secondary education. Hence, students are registered without following the required standards.

In light of the coordinator's words the research found that the monetized approach in the running of OSSs is dominant across the board. HH1 also expounded that administrators are pressured to register students without following the policy direction because of competition from other schools. He pointed out that this is so, because there is lack of proper policing of both OSS and private schools by the authorities. There is awareness of non-compliance by the head teachers, but the gain goal frame is at the centre stage and the OSSs are being run for the financial gain regardless of what the policy requires. In line with the GFT, the gain goal salience is inevitable in this context since the coordinators concede to be noncompliant to the policy in order to make more money for the teachers.

One OSS' non-compliance to the admission policy leads to the cascade effect where other OSS administrators are motivated to have an inclination towards disobeying the procedures that prohibit the noncompliant behaviour. As such they look for loopholes that maximises personal gains since the normative frame has some competing frames (Lindernberg, 2008). This results into the OSSs competing for clients and indiscriminate admissions. Hinnan-Crawford (2016) also emphasizes that while education systems are designed to be hierarchical in nature, there is unique power at the bottom (teachers) within the policy structure. Organizational theorists explain the power of teachers over the top-down policies in terms of the relationship between policy and practice being loosely coupled (Coburn, 2004; Grossman, 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The idea of loose coupling points to a subtle way of pretending in the workforce. Teachers pretend to comply with a policy they do not agree with, behaving in ways that may actually ignore the policy or even contradict it.

Thus Weaver (2009) proposes that policymakers must, therefore, listen to and learn from the implementers of public policy – who are, after all, also citizens. Failure to listen can keep governments from learning quickly what mistakes of omission or commission (or both) policymakers have made and correcting those mistakes. Failure to correct policy mistakes is likely to be a recipe for policy disaster, either in the near-term or later. The implementers' incentivised approach of admission policy may be a result of gaps in the implementation planning of the policy in OSS. The elitist nature of the way the admission policy was adopted (Sandikonda, 2013), is particularly contributing to this phenomena in the OSS where it is perceived as the bottom rung of secondary education hierarchy. As such the admissions policy needs to undergo an incremental process where certain structures in the policy domain must be reviewed to curb the policy noncompliance in OSS context. According to Dye (2013)

incrementalism is the method of change by which many small policy changes are enacted over time in order to create a larger broad policy change.

4.3.2 Role of teacher networks

Competition from unregistered OSSs and private schools

Lipsky (1980) describes teachers as “government workers who directly interact with citizens in the regular course of their jobs; whose work within the bureaucratic structure permits them wide latitude in job performance; and whose impact on the lives of citizens is extensive” (p. 393). Along these lines, the research found that social networks also play pivotal role in the noncompliance to the admission policy. Students without prerequisite qualifications were admitted in the OSS because of their social relations with a teacher or the coordinator.

We can register learners in the OSS without following the policy directive in order to maintain cordial relationships with the students or the students’ guardians. Sometimes influential figures in our society like chiefs can ask us to do them a favour to register their wards who do not want to repeat primary school. You know as private schools do [laughs] (Interviews, Coordinator 2)

Coordinator 1 also raised the same issue as he acknowledged that they may admit maids and garden boys for teachers and other people in their catchment area. He stressed that such kind of students may not possess the prerequisite qualifications for the particular level they are registered in.

This, we do to help our friends. Sometimes you never know they might help you with a favour in return (Interviews, Coordinator 1).

These observations coincide with Kadzamira's (2003) findings that access to secondary schooling in Malawi is heavily biased in favour of children from high socio-economic status families. This practice therefore enforces the hedonic frame on the part of policy implementers because it is bent towards appealing to the feelings of the implementing officers (Lindenberg, 2008). In order to maintain good relations with clients or clients' guardians, the responsible or influencing officers appeal to their emotions and short term goals putting aside the ultimate advantages of prerequisite qualifications and the policy directive. Under these conditions, meritocracy is undermined and nepotism, cronyism or favouritism flourishes since undue pressure is exerted upon implementers by guardians' social standing (Leng, 2023; & Chapman, 2002). Lindenberg (2008) notes that the hedonic goal-frame sharpens the sensitivity towards opportunities for need satisfaction and towards events that affect the way the implementer feels (which include the friendliness or unfriendliness of people at that particular moment).

The Coordinators in both schools tend to retain and exploit good relations with members of their society, as such they forego the checking of prerequisite qualifications for their private gains. The ministry also bemoaned social relations as a big challenge not only in OSS but also in PSS. The MoEST official responsible for policy issues stated:

Of course, the ministry recognizes that any system is prone to manipulation, even in the mainstream schools you can find students who were not selected. Some head teachers may register their wards or relations in the mainstream schools. So, what can stop them from doing the same in OSS? The ministry bemoans and condemns such practices (Interviews, MoEST official)

The same was reported by both Coordinators

Our OSS is hosted by a district secondary school which attracts parents to have their wards here, even if the students do not have prerequisite qualifications. So we have students who are teachers' maids and garden boys who do not possess the prerequisites. (Interviews, coordinator 1)

In order to have good relations with fellow teachers, friends and chiefs in our society we can admit unqualified students who are related to them. We also have older students who cannot go back to primary school to get the required qualifications, as such we register them. Primary does not have an open school version in our village which is flexible to cater for those in informal employment or farming activities. We have unqualified students who are teachers' and other civil servants' wives here. (Interviews, Coordinator, 2)

The coordinators here are responding to the demands of their context of implementation. In essence they are being pragmatic to the realities they are exposed to. According to Shields (1996) public administrators or policy implementers practice in a world of paradox and contradiction, disorder and pattern. They may be required to narrow their focus and concentrate on rules and regulations. On the other hand, public administrators may need bargaining skills to ensure that organizational conflict is resolved (Lipsky, 1980). However the theory/practice connection is blotted with tension in public administration. First, it is often difficult for practitioners to see the value of theory. From their perspective, theory seldom mirrors experienced reality. It seems removed from the world of practice (Shield, 1996). Above all, social networks

prove to be powerful tools that influence implementers' action as regards strict adherence to policy directives (Lipsky, 1980). Hence, the bottom-up approach scholars reject the legislative objective as a standard for evaluation and typically develop their own set of standards they carefully justify (Winter, 2012). It is within these tensions and rejection of legislated positions that noncompliance surfaces.

The study found that students are registered in OSS without following what the admissions policy stipulates because other schools are willing to do so. The Coordinators revealed that some open schools in their catchment area are not registered with MCDE, which means that they are operating without meeting the requirements and such schools are difficult to monitor and supervise because they are not known by MCDE. There are also other private schools whose admission of students depends on students' ability to pay school fees. This kind of competition for clients motivates implementers of the policy to weigh the benefits and losses that come along with the implementation of the policy as one Coordinator reported.

We do understand the advantages of following what the admission policy states, but we have a challenge of competition in our catchment area. For instance, there are students who do not possess the PSLCE and have money, but want to register with us. It becomes difficult to turn such students down considering that other schools are going to register them. And those schools include private schools and other OSSs whether registered or not. So it boils down to a business decision. (Interview, Coordinator 2).

The Host Head teacher 1(HH1) also observed that private schools in their catchment area are not regulated as public secondary schools, as such; they do not adhere to the

admission policy. He also admitted that it becomes problematic to ask prospective students whether they have JCE or PSLCE because it might scare away their clients. The OSSs are interested in growth and the way forward is to have more students registered. The Host Head teacher 2 (HH2) added that having an OSS is a way of having added “remuneration” as such sanity lacks in as far as the implementation of the policy is concerned. He added that the ministry should find ways to encourage the private school association in Malawi (Prisam) to come up with a regulatory framework for the policy in question as is the case with MCDE, so that sanity could be brought back. The competition is unhealthy for the policy as such the HH2 suggested that both the MCDE and the private schools board should police the schools to ensure that the policy is implemented.

This suggests that non-compliance to the admission policy is perpetual, in that some stakeholders are interested in the financial gain from the OSS. The normative goal frame is belittled because both coordinators and host head teachers availed the interest in the financial gains from the schools. The gain goal frame is salient across the board because there is lack of sanctions from responsible regulatory authorities for schools that deviate from the norm. The schools also view their situation as competitive in terms of registering more students; hence the focus has been directed on private gain. This pings the salience of the hedonic goal, of competing with other schools in admitting more students, towards the gain frame to maximize the funds accrued in the event of admitting unqualified students. As Lindenberg (2022) puts it that within the GFT, salience of competing goals changes based on the implementer’s urgency at a given moment. The implementation sites for the admission policy in Malawi OSS do not uphold the normative goal stipulated in the NEP and MCDE mandate. The context

perpetuates decisions that prioritize immediate pleasure and emotional wellbeing of implementers even though the policy is rational or beneficial in the long run.

Mitigating the competition is of great importance to curtail the practice of registering students without qualifications in OSS. Many scholars have concluded that this can be achieved through fostering a culture of collaboration and shared goals (Lipsky, 1980; May & Winter, 2009; and Bardach & Patashnik, 2023). Clear communication, establishing common objectives, providing adequate resources and support, promoting accountability and evaluating and feedback loops have been found to be the crosscutting initiatives to fend off competition that enhance policy non-compliance. Due to the policy's elitist nature (Sandikonda, 2013) there seems to be a lax approach to vertical coordination of administrative decisions and policy directives in CDSSs.

This, coupled with Gwede's (2013) and Chimpololo's (2010) observations that untrained ODL practitioners, inadequate institutional capacity, inadequate learner support services and negative perception of ODL as a mode of teaching, learning, and training, deepens the lack of horizontal coordination amongst the OSS. Coordination between individual OSSs is virtually non-existent as the following chapter reveals the concerns raised by the two scholars. Aside that it was found that the Malawi OSS is self-sponsored as opposed to the Part Time Continuing Education (PTCE) program in Zimbabwe, Springboard Humanism (SBH) project in Botswana, and Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) which have sponsorships ranging from NGOs to governments (Ngware et al, 2018). Incremental changes can be achieved by borrowing a leaf from its counterparts as noncompliance to policy directives is tamed by the sponsoring bodies (Ngware et al, 2018).

4.4 The Admission Policy regulatory enforcement/stakeholders' interface with OSSs

The research unearthed that there is lack of stakeholders' commitment to open schools which continues to relegate these schools to the periphery of alternatives for accessing quality secondary education. The implication of this is that open secondary school initiative has not been fully utilized as a potential synergy to the provision of quality secondary education. Despite open schooling being a feasible alternative for increasing access to quality secondary education, the research found that the interface amongst the policy's stakeholders is only in a paperwork frame, where factors that enhance the linkages are deficient. The MCDE Handbook (2019) highlights training of implementers, inspections and regulation, and cooperation and coordination as key factors to perpetrate interaction and have its directives adhered to by OSSs. The following discussion extrapolate how these and other inherent context driven factors pan out in the OSSs in relation to the implementation of the admission policy

4.4.1 Training of implementers

Training often involves interaction between policy formulators, regulators who set guidelines and implementers who carry out policies into practice (UNESCO, 2002; Hallsworth, Parker & Rutter, 2011; and COL, 2022). Effective communication and collaboration between these two is crucial. The Commonwealth Online Learning (2022) also posits that aside traditional teacher education operating ODL institutions require specialized training and expertise. In line with this, the policy implementing officers were asked whether they had been trained by the MCDE on how to run the OSSs. Both schools' heads and coordinators explained that they had never undergone any training except for a single day workshop which focused on how funds should be managed.

There has been none whatsoever, any kind of strong interaction between our school and the MCDE in as far as admission issues are concerned. It is a matter of directives as put in the NEP and MCDE handbook. (Interviews, HH1)

We have never attended any training organised by the MCDE on how to run the OSSs, rather we use knowledge from the main school and the policy papers. Mostly the work is done by the coordinator under my instructions as we are also instructed to do so by the MCDE. (Interviews, HH2)

Lack of training can contribute to noncompliance as implementers may have an inclination towards doing what their context demands and not what the policy stipulates. Every policy has inherent tensions which are ironed out by staff training, as it provides a link between the policy makers and implementers where policy goal is continuously clarified (Abdoullahi & Othman, 2020). So, employees may not fully understand the policies, or procedures or regulations they are supposed to follow. This lack of understanding can contribute to mistakes, oversights or intentional disregard of compliance requirements.

The coordinators also had these observations:

In the past four years I have been the coordinator at this school, I have attended a one day workshop facilitated by the MCDE that addressed OSS issues only once. (Interview, Coordinator 2).

I think this workshop was meant to intimidate us not to ask anything about how the 30% of the fees the host school gets is utilised [...]. I think the workshop was orchestrated by the host head teachers so that

they shield themselves from our inquisitive nous about the funds.

(Interview, Coordinator 1).

However, training can lead to noncompliance if it is ineffective or if there are mismatches between the training content and the actual work environment. Hallsworth et al (2011) note that there are gaps between theory and practice in the policy making and implementation processes. They observed that the dominant model of the policy process is unrealistic; there is clarity on the desired qualities of policy making, but not on how to achieve them, so attempts to embed them have failed to make notable progress; and structural changes have been incoherent and incomplete, and face new challenges.

This observation entails that the regulators are not doing enough in as far as admission policy is implemented and regulated. The mismatch or lack of training in the running of OSSs is not providing parameters against which practices and standards are to be judged. The MCDE assumes that coordinators are government officials who run the PSS and therefore they will adhere to policies and instructions in OSS as they do in PSS.

The MCDE official had this to say in the study's interview

We believe in the system coupled with the profession being noble, the teachers cannot manipulate it for their personal gains. The coordinators are government officials who know what should be done. They have a mandate to vet students before registering them, just like any trained doctor has the mandate to administer medicine on patients [...] in addition to that learners who evade the required admission process are

going to be rejected by the system that's why we have examinations after every two years. (Interview, MCDE Official)

The belief in the trustworthiness of implementers is misleading in as far as quality policy implementation is concerned. Training plays a big role in risk mitigation, performance improvement and building trust because implementers have direct engagement with regulators or policy makers. This can boost morale, job satisfaction and knowledge retention. The view that the system will reject those who evade the requirements compromises the whole idea of quality education which is measured through pass rates and retention rates among other factors (MoEST, 2019).

4.4.2 *Inspections and regulation*

School inspections help teachers to benefit from the authorities' advice. This would help teachers to correct where they are not doing well. The study found that the MoEST and MCDE plan for quality assurance inspections for the OSSs. However the open schools implementing officers reported that there is lack of strong regulatory framework as far as the admission policy is concerned. The MoEST also explained that they rely on trust that the OSS coordinators follow their mandate to verify students' prerequisite qualifications when admitting them. The MCDE also emphasized that the implementing officers were civil servants whom the government trusted to work as professionals hence they cannot default what the policy stipulates.

The MCDE official had this to say:

The system cannot be compromised because it is not a one man show.
The registration process is done by professionals who are qualified.
The MCDE vested its powers into the coordinators to act on its behalf
where the MCDE monitors the admission files which include the

previous record/qualifications of admitted students. So in this case, the facilitators are professionals whom the MCDE believes cannot bow down to compromise, as far as OSSs are run. If there is anything contrary to what the policy stipulates then it comes down to a disciplinary issue against the culprits. (Interviews, MCDE Respondent)

The MoEST also reported that the inspection tours that the ministry carries out are planned for both the PSS and the OSS. Nevertheless, PSSs are always prioritized whenever such inspections are done. One respondent stated that it was discouraged to prioritize the use of government resources on OSS instead of PSS. Teacher facilitators as a resource are discouraged to indulge themselves in the OSS at the expense of PSS. Time, space and other educational resources are prioritized on the running of PSSs. This means the inspection tours also prioritize the PSS as opposed to the OSS. This is evident in both schools' implementing officers' responses on the question of inspections. Both OSSs' host heads reported that due to lack of proper regulatory framework action, the OSS continue to face challenges with the admission practice as it can be manipulated for private gain by different implementing stakeholders. The MCDE official also purported that they do regulate the admission policy through monitoring workshops which also involve checking of students' track records.

However, this is not enough since one host head teacher had this to say:

The MCDE needs to have a good plan in terms of monitoring, even if it involves moving around making sure that no OSSs are operating without being registered. This will bring sanity in order for the standards to be adhered to. The MCDE must be strict, making sure that the policy is obeyed. The quality assurance team from the ministry frequent school

visits must also consider beefing up the effort of the MCDE so that the operating institutions adhere to set standards and policies. (Interview, HH1)

The head teacher regretted that there are a lot of anomalies with the way the MCDE fails to police the implementation process as well as the teaching and learning transaction in OSS. He noted that there is non-compliance in most schools because of lack of such inspections. He cited that the MCDE seems to be working under the assumption that OSSs run under government institutions, as such they are obliged to follow the regulations. However, without the inspections, he pointed that policy implementers might have different motivations and interest in the system as such there is need to police them as a way of regulating its policies. He also explained that most schools are interested in growth which is mostly done to maximize income from the OSS. As such there is a tendency of admitting students without the required standards. He emphasized that the MCDE needs to come up with a proper framework of inspection or regulation in order to fulfill its mandate as a regulator of OSS admission.

4.4.3 Coordination and cooperation among the policy stakeholders

Before delving into the interaction of all stakeholders of the admission policy in the OSS, the concept of coordination and cooperation needs to be defined to bring them into the perspective of this study. Coordination refers to the organization of all activities in an orderly manner, to achieve unanimity of individual efforts in the pursuit of group goals. Cooperation on the other hand, is a discretionary action of individuals to work together or help one another for a mutual benefit (OECD, 2023). In the OSS context the research looked at the role of all stakeholders to establish how they coordinate and cooperate to achieve compliance with the admission policy. The

study found information was disbursed to all stakeholders as regards how to admit students, but there was no cooperation from the stakeholders on the same due to varying factors.

The MCDE and MoEST provided guidelines through the MCDE handbook as to how students are to be admitted in the OSS. Within the schools the admitting officers work under instructions from the host headmasters who do not check how the exercise is conducted. The same is reflected in the schools this research took place.

The MCDE would want to have students pass through their system adhering to the admission policy, but the MCDE seems to be lax in their regulatory approach. There are a lot of unregistered schools operating as OSSs which do not comply with different education standards. So the MCDE needs to police or even close those OSSs to curb the practice of noncompliance to policies. Sometimes people need to be forced to do the right thing. (Interview, HH1)

It was also observed that for the past 4 years the schools had not been inspected or audited. The HH1 regretted the fact that MCDE and MoEST had no proper policing structure to curb admissions that do not comply with the policy in OSS. To make matters worse, there is no any kind of coordination and cooperation between individual OSSs as regards the admission policy. Respondents at OSS 1 had this to say:

As I already said, we sometimes operate as a business because we know some purported OSSs register unqualified students in their schools. Actually it is an unhealthy competition and environment for admission policy and there is no room that we can go and negotiate

with them to follow the rules. Sometimes I feel like it is unfair to expect us to do otherwise. (Interview, Coordinator 1)

The ministry and MCDE must come with a plan of some kind to enhance collaboration between the OSSs. I guess this would boost regulatory mechanics. As of now, we do not have definite channels to report the non-compliers which include private schools and if we did, I don't know if they would act vigilantly. The policing structures are poor. (Interview, HH1)

The ministry also shoulders the blame for making the admission policy less effective because the private schools are not properly regulated when it comes to implementing the policy. The research found that the admission policy is implemented and regulated differently across the PSS, OSS and private schools. In PSS, the policy is centrally regulated and in OSS, the policy's implementation is decentralized (MoEST, 2019 and MCDE, 2017) whereas in private schools, the ability to pay tuition fees comes first (Chimombo, et al 2014). The OECD (2023) observes that adult learning policies (of which OSSs are part of) are often less effective than they could be, due to fragmented institutional responsibilities and a lack of coordination. Coordination efforts across relevant government authorities and stakeholders are therefore crucial to avoid overlapping or incoherent policy efforts. The outcomes of secondary education go by the same standards, qualify with the same paper and compete for the same job opportunities as such entry into system requires the same standards of the regulatory scheme.

The study also discovered that the regulatory framework lacks horizontal coordination where each OSS chose whether to implement the policy or not. The schools did not

cooperate with each other but were rather in a collision course, where they saw each other as competition for clients that provided financial returns for the host institution and teacher facilitators. There is also lack of strong vertical coordination where the MCDE and the MoEST has trained OSS coordinators and host head teachers only once in a period of four years. This suggests that there are no evaluations of the policy in practice that would foster some changes to cater for contextual differences between OSSs, PSSs and private schools in respect to the admission policy. Training also enforces confidence in the system as implementers are equipped with knowledge and skills to combat corruption and improve admission practices. As a form of vertical co-ordination between stakeholders on adult learning policies (of which OSS is part of), it is also a platform where whistle-blower protection procedures are put across to ensure that unethical behaviour is communicated without fear of retaliation (OECD, 2013).

The lack of coordination perpetuated haphazard implementation of the admission policy hence the school coordinators attested to registering students without the required standards. The students also attested to having classmates whom they knew do not possess prerequisite qualifications. This situation indicates that the normative goal is weak, hence it is pushed in the background and the ego frames take charge. The GFT assumes that one's goals and the way one defines the situation are interrelated. In other words, perception and motivations become harmonized in a to-and-fro process. Therefore, goals tend to be situation dependent rather than stable across situations. Thus, students were registered for financial gain and social cognizance by the implementing officers although at times they followed the policy.

If quality standards are formulated and conceptualised in a collaborative way at the outset, they can be a mechanism for co-ordination between intermediaries rather than

merely an instrument of control. Quality standards are communicated through training where quality criteria and reporting requirements for services linked to a particular adult learning policy are emphasised in the implementation stage (OECD, 2013). Quality standards imply regular monitoring to ensure a level of homogeneity in the implementation of the respective policy across different intermediaries. This also offers recurring opportunities for exchange and feedback between intermediaries and the responsible government authority. So the study further established factors that exist to disturb coordination and cooperation concerning admission policy.

4.4.4 *Enrolment limit discrepancies*

The study also found that the OSS is conducive for over admission of students because there is no limit for enrolment. HH1 and both coordinators indicated that they would want to see their schools grow and they did not have a particular target number for their schools. Coordinator 2 argued that they do not have a limit for enrolment because that would defeat the purpose of OSS in increasing access to secondary education. He purported that limiting enrolment would also limit the amount of fees collected which in the long run would result into low allowances for teacher facilitators.

The MCDE respondent vindicated the coordinators' views that:

Our aim is to increase access to education and it is not about pushing students in a classroom seating before a teacher but to make sure that they register and learn even at their own time, anytime at any place. That's why we produce open learning materials. (Interview, MCDE official)

In one of the research site, the open school learners were found learning outside of the classrooms which makes it possible for the school to enroll as many students as possible. This situation, coupled with the fact that the facilitators consider OSS as an income generating agent makes it possible for admitting students without adhering to the admission policy.

OSSs are not restricted to a particular limit of students to be registered in their school as is the case with PSSs which are ‘working towards having a 1:60 teacher student ratio’ (MoEST, 2020). This is justified with the MCDE official’s sentiments:

In an ideal OSS the learning approach is basically through facilitation and not the actual face to face teaching as is the case in conventional schools. So the ratios are not applicable in OSSs. (Interview, MCDE official)

Thus, lack of teacher student ratio in OSS encourages schools to evade the admission policy when registering students in order to fend off competition from other schools and maximize fees collection. The ratio, if imposed, would however curb the practice of non-compliance to the admission policy as competition for students would be kept in check. OSS coordinators have reported that they fail to adhere to the policy due to competition from their counterparts who are willing to forego the policy when registering students. Currently, OSS students are taught as in conventional schools, and the reporting system of the malpractice is vague. The MCDE official explained:

The responsibility of reporting non-compliance to the admission policy lies in the hands of the citizenry which are parents, students, teachers and any responsible citizen who feels that quality in education matters

[...] Luckily, we have not witnessed such a scenario where students have been reported to be admitted without adhering to the policy.

This clearly indicates that the reporting system is not effective as coordinators have revealed that they run OSSs as incoming generating agents. Perhaps the student teacher ratio in OSS would provide for schools to be reporting other schools that do not abide by the policy, which would encourage inspection on precise schools involved in the malpractice. This decisive reporting system would also encourage vertical coordination between the OSSs and the MCDE or the MoEST. It would also enhance horizontal coordination amongst the OSSs which currently seems to be non-existent as is the case with PSSs.

4.4.5 Rewards and sanctions for (non-) compliance to NEP admission policy in OSS

The study found that there are vague sanctions in respect to non-compliance of the admission policy. The OSS coordinators are expected to implement the policy under the pretext that they are trained professionals who also do the same in the mainstream school.

The MCDE official had this to say in the interview:

The facilitators know their duties and responsibilities and they know the consequences of what they are going to face after mismanaging something. [...] Whenever there is general misbehaviour by the teachers the HR section deal with it and this includes not following what the policy stipulates. The reporting mechanism within the system is there and teaching being a noble job, there are many stakeholders to report such misbehaviour. (Interview, MCDE official)

The official also had problems to extrapolate the clear sanctions that are followed when an OSS coordinator fails to adhere to the admission policy citing reasons that they have never had such cases. By the fact that the reporting mechanism is open to all, it is strange that the coordinators and students have admitted to having unqualified students registered in OSSs. Meanwhile, OSS coordinators specified that sanctions of any malpractice in OSS include being removed from the post of OSS coordinator and/or being banned from participating in the open secondary school. This clearly indicates that the lack of clear sanctioning framework regarding noncompliance to the policy promotes indiscriminate admissions in the OSSs.

On the part of the Ministry, the official interviewed mostly outlined disciplinary actions that are applicable to PSSs and he was quick to point out that the MCDE was the sole leader in the running of OSSs.

The ministry is aware that admission's malpractices are there. That is why the ministry has put in place sanctions to head teachers who do not follow policy directives and requirements. Actually it is against the law to conduct illegal admission exercise, thus sanctions such as suspensions and transfers of head teachers and teachers are put in place once they are found. However, demotion is not one of those sanctions.

(Interview, MoEST Official)

Notably, the ministry provided a general response as to how general misconduct is disciplined in PSSs. The MCDE official is also basically alluding to the same but there are discrepancies as to how students are admitted in the schools. As already observed, the admission mechanism is centralized in PSS where as in OSS it is decentralized.

In policy compliance studies, rewards and sanction play a crucial role in ensuring that policy directives and standards are upheld. Gezelius (2002) notes that, “when an implementer has clear knowledge of the rewards or sanctions of implementing a particular action, voluntary compliance seemingly becomes automatic”. The punishments signal to the implementers their normative obligations to the whole target population (Weaver, 2014) and when they are not clear or seem to have disappeared then the normative goal weakens, and violations of related norms may become widespread. This is clearly the case in OSSs as the implementers and clients to the policy admitted that the policy is not adhered to. This therefore indicates a dent in the way the OSSs, MCDE and the ministry are linked on issues concerning admission policy.

This therefore, calls to attention Lindernberg’s concept of policy misinterpretation which derails the policy implementation from the normative goal frame (2008). Fehr et al (2003) concludes that when sanctions are interpreted as supporting the group, they promote cooperation. And when sanctions are interpreted as supporting private gain, they reduce the willingness to cooperate if the punishment is not high enough. Thus, cues that convey the normative goal frame of admitting students based on prerequisite qualifications trigger a different goal-frame that promotes ego goals which perpetuates private gain.

4.5 Admission practice in OSS

4.5.1 The need for paradigm shift

Articulating the admission practice in OSS paints a difficulty picture as there are a lot of misgivings that call to attention unaddressed tensions in the policy’s formulation and implementation approaches. The policy has spurned over years with its elite approach origin in 1971 at which point some of the modes of education including

OSSs were nonexistent (MCDE, 2017; Sandikonda, 2013). Since the introduction of OSS in the early 2000, there has been none whatsoever change in the way the policy must be implemented. There is need for paradigm shift to address the explored shortfalls in this study. This change therefore needs to engage the incremental policy approach where the top-down efforts must be aligned with the experiences of policy implementers where bottom up tenets must be embraced to adjust the policy to reflect the changes that have taken place. This means there will be a hybrid of bottom up and top down approaches in the policy's implementation.

There has been no improvement of performance over the years. The MCDE respondent indicated that there has been no significant increase in OSS pass rate since they are still below 50% as opposed to the performances of mainstream schools.

From our on-going study conducted in 22% of OSSs, the pass rate in the period between 2018 and 2022, the average pass rate at MSCE is 39.4% and at JCE from 2020 to 2022, the average is 49%. The numbers are still low as you can see because our aim is to have over 50% pass rates at all levels (Interview, MCDE official)

The official concedes the need for things to change as their goal is not met yet. In the findings of this study implementation of admission policy is at fault and it could be one contributing factor to this performance. Hence, the research highlights the areas that need improvement regarding implementation, where significant changes have to be made from the experience of the implementers and the period gone by. The policy is well suited to the mainstream schools as there is inbuilt control mechanism. In OSSs there is need for paradigm shift to reflect input of implementers to achieve a hybridised approach of implementation and to reformulate the policy incrementally.

4.5.2 Incrementalism in OSS

Incrementalism as an approach of policy making entails adopting small gradual changes to an already existing policy to tailor-make the policy to contextual differences of implementation sites (Dye, 2013). In this approach, policy making is viewed as on-going and interactive and it is assessed in terms of the processes that lead to the realisation of policy objectives which include the policy context; directives for implementations, integrated action that are aimed at policy delivery and the adaptation that takes place while the policy process is in progress (University Of Pretoria, 2014). In light of this approach, these changes need to be adopted in reflection to what this research has found. The study has found that there is inadequate training, inspection and coordination among other pitfalls which are bound to compromise the success of the implementation of the admission policy. Brook Napier (2005) identifies three “success factors” as being particularly crucial for implementation namely: administrative development/institutional development; significant in-service teacher training; and strategies for commitment among key groups.

In addition, incrementalism involves a concept of bounded learning which makes it similar to rational learning – a stage that is mostly used to onset the making of new policies (Knill and Tosun, 2008). In that case, governments likewise engage in information gathering activity but do not scan all available experience and instead use analytical shortcuts and cognitive heuristics to process the information (Meseguer Yebra 2003, 2006; Weyland 2004). An example of such heuristics is the adoption of policies from countries that are considered as being particularly successful or the emulation of policies that have already been adopted by a large number of other states. It has also been found that the socio-economic motivations perpetuate

implementers' noncompliance in both sites which means that there are policy practice gaps that needs addressing.

Ngware et al, (2018) note that the Malawi OSS is a self-sponsored system as opposed to the neighbouring countries' ODL systems. Borrowing a leaf from these countries, whose ODSS versions are sponsored by the government or otherwise private entities would be a good starting point for incremental changes as the ODSS and MCDE would be answerable to the sponsor in question. For instance in Zimbabwe under the PTCE, teachers are not paid from students' fees but rather by the project which is supplemented by income generated at learning centres from activities initiated by the project (Ngware et al, 2018). This means teachers have a fixed rate rather than the ever fluctuating rate under OSS in Malawi where teachers receive honoraria administered from the fees paid by enrolled students (MCDE, 2017). The fact that the rate fluctuates is also emphasised by the respondents:

The more students we have the more financial returns for teachers, hence we operate as a business. (Interview, coordinator 2)

The teachers receive salaries from the government for the work they do in mainstream schools. In the OSSs they are given honoraria which I am afraid yes, is more when they register more students (MCDE official)

This means coordinators are encouraged to register more students for their teachers' private gain. To maximise the gain they forego the admission practice which would not be the case if they have a fixed rate for the honoraria.

4.5.3 Collaborative implementation approach

Kadzamila and Rose (2001) conclude that for most policies to work in Malawi there has to be donor exertion of influence because of weak organization structures. This study has unearthed a number of interconnected factors that attest to weak organisation in the running of OSS admissions altogether. Inadequate engagement of stakeholders especially the implementers, the decentralised regulatory framework, lack of coordination between implementers, unclear rewards and sanction mechanism, and unclear enrolment limit invite the implementers to attend to their ego needs, rather than the normative goal which is admitting students with prerequisite qualifications. Aside that they are also forced to be practical in line with what their implementation contexts demand. However, Brook Napier (2005) posits that aid and development programs contain special implications for developing countries wherein strings are attached to donor funds and priorities are often externally determined, out of line with real needs on the ground. This could be expected if an NGO or another organization is to take charge in the running of OSSs. Hence the need for incorporation of bottom up leadership when adopting such changes which must be facilitated by the MoEST, because it remains the custodian of access to quality secondary education.

Hannum (2003) further observe that as many countries adopt fiscal decentralization policies, local community resource issues play an important role in educational provision and in possibly perpetuating stratification or inequity. Pertinently, alternative delivery systems such as distance education and NGO programs are often also underdeveloped, or they might be the only viable means of access to education in developing countries (Brook Napier, 2005). These huge areas of underdevelopment demand careful formulation of notions of “success” or “failure” of reform programs

when capacity is lacking and when goals are overly ambitious in the face of stark realities. This therefore begs the question of incremental changes while embracing the input of the policy implementers. Much as top down ideologies must be embraced, the bottom up input must also be incorporated in informing government decisions to maintain quality in the admission practice.

A mix of top down and bottom up implementation approaches would also be facilitated by the incremental changes adopted since the changes are not made from the blues but are research based. This study has discovered an intersection of factors which have derailed the admission policy expectations in OSS. These factors need not be overhauled but scrutinized to cater for the needs of quality education while access is being granted to deserving students. Both approaches are therefore achieved through collaborative implementation where the policy actors form a network as opposed to the traditional top down traditional policy implementation (Koontz and Newig, 2014).

Rather than viewing policy as an authoritative directive or program from government, the collaborative implementation focuses on the carrying out of collaboratively agreed upon recommendations that do not have the force of law. Noncompliance to the admission policy is clearly present in both OSSs. The respondents attested that lack of strong regulatory framework creates a basis for maximising financial gains. The force of the law is incoherent to the OSS context as it is noted by Ngware et al (2014) that the OSS run on private basis which agrees with the observation of Chimombo et al (2014) that fees collection is a priority factor in students' admission. The traditional policy implementation depends on policy design that gives clear directives, standards, and delineates administrative responsibilities to agencies with fewer veto points as is

the case with the mainstream schools where regulation is inbuilt. Collaborative implementation depends on recommendations that provide clear criteria for resolving goal conflicts among stakeholders. The conflict in OSS is very eminent as it has been evidenced in the research where OSSs compete for learners due to their business nature. There is also no cooperation and collaboration of individual OSSs administratively thereby increasing the chances of noncompliance to the policy. Collaborative implementation needs all stakeholders to take responsibility to creating a conducive context for quality admission practice.

In the current framework of implementation there seem to be a single decision point responsible for regulation which is the MCDE while practically the decentralised nature of the OSS admission process seems to upset the top down frame in which the policy was originally framed. There is need of coming up with an inter-OSSs policy implementation to foster a pooled decision making rather than a sequential frame as is the case in mainstream secondary schools. Inter-organisational relationship must not only end at the OSS level, but it must also involve the MoEST and MCDE to come up with a strong regulatory framework.

Koontz et al (2016) note that inter-organizational policy implementation depends on processes that have managerial networking and skillful leaders to coordinate, build support, find common interests, and broker exchanges for resource sharing. This suggests that the elite nature of the policy needs scrutiny where the top down attributes that enhances the policy non adherence in OSSs be shaped to enforce collaboration of implementers. Collaborative implementation depends more on the degree to which target groups participate in creating the recommendations and represent the diversity of stakeholder interests.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the findings of the study which are in terms of themes. Using the goal framework theory, the study has revealed that some crucial aspects of the admission policy in open school such as enrolment requirements, training of teacher facilitators, inspections and cooperation mechanisms are not taken seriously. This ultimately affects quality of open school learners' performance as the policy is somewhat implemented in a weaker regulatory framework which encourages no compliance on the part of the policy implementers. Using the OSS as an income generating agent, competition to grow amongst OSSs and private schools, and teachers' social networks have been revealed to be the lead instigators of coordinators' noncompliance to the admission policy. There is need to beef up the already existing regulatory framework as prescribed in the MCDE handbook through hands on collaboration amongst stake holders. The decentralised nature of admission in OSSs lacks integrity because there is lack of clarity in the way the policy has been framed and supported by the government. Policy gymnastics to improve the implementation of admission policy has also been engaged where a hybrid of top down and bottom up implementation approaches have been suggested to inform the incremental changes to be made.

All the highlighted misgivings call to attention on the lack of mechanism that enforces the four regulatory principles as raised by the National Audit Office (2021). The design, analyse, intervene and learn principles can be applied in the OSS context as the study has encountered clear situations through which they can be implemented. Under design, the research found that all the policy stakeholders are aware of the policy intention and its purpose. The study also unearthed that there are principles that are meant to help regulators and policymakers to analyse the OSS market. Such

principles include inspections and regulation, as well as training which however, have been found wanting. The interventions have also been reported to be lacking by some stakeholders of the policy who ultimately apply the learn principle to their advantage in terms of their ego gains as opposed to the normative intended goal. Saliency of the goals swings in a pendulum where the implementers find it easier to manipulate the policy to their hedonic and gain goals. The normative goal is also implemented as they like since collaboration in attaining the goal is almost non-existent. The absence of donor exertion on the policy (as is always the case with effective policy implementation in Malawi) also downplays the force of its implementation hence the need for incremental changes.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the conclusions and implications based on the study findings and discussions of the reconciliation of admission policy and practice in OSS. The chapter also recommends other important areas in the open schools identified during the research which may require attention for further studies.

5.2 Conclusion and implications

The study explored the admission practices and processes in open secondary schools and their nature of compliance to the admission aspirations of the MCDE mandate and the NEP. Admission in open secondary school is carried out by individual coordinators with the help of other facilitators who at the end of the day report to the host head teacher and the MCDE. The OSS admission system is different to the admission in mainstreams where an inbuilt central mechanism from the MoEST ensures compliance to the admission policy and regulates students' admission. The study asked the question; "How consistent is admission practice in Open Secondary Schools with National Education Policy and MCDE mandate aspirations?" And it found that OSS coordinators' practice is not fully in tandem with what the NEP and MCDE mandate stipulate. The coordinators tend to prioritise personal gains over the policy and they tend to manipulate the contextual loopholes which do not exist in the

mainstream schools as they admit students. In the attempts to answer the main research question the study was guided by the following objective questions 1. “What is the nature of awareness in Open Secondary Schools about standard admission requirements as per the NEP aspirations?” 2. “What are the processes of and the primary considerations in OSSs admission?” And 3. “How do relevant regulatory authorities (MoEST, and MCDE) interface with Open Secondary Schools to conform to admission policy standards?”

The findings of the study show that the administrators are well aware of the admission policy and the same directives asked of them in mainstream schools are the same to be applied in OSSs. The coordinators also understand that it is in the interest of the MoEST to maintain standards in OSSs as they promote access to secondary education, since access to quality education is one corner stone of National Education Policy in Malawi. The coordinators are well aware that students’ qualification must determine students’ admission in the OSS.

However, the respondents concede non adherence to the policy because they perceived it as disadvantaging their self-utility, psycho-socially and economically. The admission processes and practices were found to be inclined towards maximising monetary gains for both individual teachers and the institutions. Increasing teachers’ gains, competing in the market and promoting informal relationships bent to perpetuate noncompliance to the policy were the common themes that the respondents highlighted. This therefore led to indiscriminate enrolment of students in OSS as regards possession of prerequisite qualifications. The implication of this is that OSS initiative continues to fail to live up to the standards of mainstream schools. Essentially, it is evident from the study that OSS is the viable alternative for increasing access to secondary education because it is able to cater for students of a

wide range of individual needs as opposed to mainstream schools. However, the practices there in are compromising the intended goal of providing access to quality education.

Quality standards remain important and crosscutting among the types of schools that offer secondary education by the Malawi government. The admission policy is a case in point regarding offering secondary education across the board. The study has but found that the policy is not fully implemented due to lack of stakeholder's commitment as reflected in the way implementers evade it for their private gain. The regulatory framework is weak in that compliance to the policy is disarrayed by many intertwined factors. Coordinators admit students without following the set standards, as they are able to manipulate the figures to their advantage since there is no enrolment limit. Inadequate training and inspections, lack of clear coordination and cooperation, and lack of clear reward/sanction mechanism have been found to be some factors contributing to the weak policy enforcement.

The linkages between the OSS stakeholders are not clearly defined or regulated as such, the indiscriminate admission is exacerbated. The policy implementers in OSS do not have any kind of cooperation as such they perceive each other as competitors instead of collaborators. The implementers also know that there will not be any repercussions for not complying with the policy since they feel the regulatory mechanism is not enforced enough. These findings therefore set in motion an urge to have the MCDE review implementation context and practices of the admission policy in OSSs. Considering the way the policy was conceptualised, formulated and implemented reflects biases on the mainstream schools contexts where the implementers are controlled centrally and room for manipulation is minimal.

The study has found that the geographical setting, whether urban or rural, does not play any role to deter noncompliance rather there are oversights on the role of implementers in the implementation stage. These oversights can be dealt with through the policy stakeholders' engagement where the incremental changes can be planned for, to address implementers' concerns. The policy failures highlighted in this paper could be used as stepping stones for transformative strategies and insights that can curb the policy noncompliance during implementation.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations to the Malawi College of Distance Education

The MCDE should be active to train OSS facilitators on how to run OSSs and implement ODL policies. Training provides feedback loops through which regulators, OSS heads and coordinators assist each other in the implementation of directives, strategies and policies. Further to this, the MCDE should devise a plan to provide an in built framework that regulates the admission policy as it is the case in public secondary school. Learning from other SSA ODLs, the research revealed that having teachers a defined allowance can help curb indiscriminate admissions or the use of an independent body that facilitates coordination amongst OSSs so that the practice gets minimized. Finally, the MCDE must provide a platform for incremental changes to the admission policy to reflect context as secondary education is basic education.

5.3.2 Recommendations to the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology should evaluate the admission policy of the students into Malawi Open secondary schools to check its effectiveness and efficiency. Considering that the admission policy is elitist, the study has grounds to claim that the indiscriminate admissions are not limited to the OSSs. Hence, the policy must be aligned to the demands of the whole society since ODL initiatives

strive to intergrate them into mainstream secondary education (World Bank, 2016). The Ministry of Education Science and Technology should also devise a plan to inspect and audit coordination between the Malawi College of Distance Education and Open Secondary Schools. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology should provide a plan for gradual changes to facilitate cooperation and coordination of individual OSSs as is the case in mainstream schools.

5.3.3 *Recommendations for Further Research*

The following are recommendations for further research

The research was conducted using a convenient sampling of two open secondary schools in one district; a full research covering the remaining three education division would be ideal to understand the gravity of (non-) compliance to the admission policy in the OSSs across the divisions. This would inform the value of high stakes examinations and the resultant qualifications of Malawi secondary education. If schools are willing to forego the use of prerequisite qualifications when admitting students, what value does the MSCE have? The study can be furthered into higher learning institutions as regards the value of MSCE in admitting students in the universities. The other area which may be of interest to do research is in the realm of policy interpretation to determine any education policy's subjectivity to manipulation by implementers in secondary schools

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

In the chapter, conclusions have been drawn based on the findings of the experiences and perspectives of host head teachers, OSS coordinators, students, MCDE and MoEST officials in open secondary schools in Zomba district. The research aimed at exploring whether the admission policy is implemented or not and the motivations of (non-) compliance have been established. The chapter has also highlighted some

implications following the research findings. Lastly, recommendations to the different stakeholders of the policy and further study areas have been made.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide for the Selected Open Secondary School Coordinator

This research is conducted only to meet academic purpose as part of completion of Master Degree Program. The researcher is a master's degree student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA) who is obliged to prepare a thesis in order to finalize his studies. The research aims to identify admission practices in open and distance learning in Zomba Rural zone. The research shall also come-up with proposals for further actions with the aim of improving open and distance learning in Malawi. The findings of this study shall be useful to both, the researcher and other stakeholders that are working or interested in open and distance learning including the government. Thus your participation is highly appreciated; kindly respond to all questions with accuracy. All information provided shall be treated and used only for the stated objectives.

Part A: Demographic Characteristics

Please circle the appropriate response(s)

1. Gender 1 = Male 2 = Female

Level of Education 1 = doctorate level 2 = masters level 3 = degree level 4 = Other
(Please specify)

5. Number of years working as the Open School Coordinator 1 = Less than 1 year 2 = between 2-5 years 3 = More than 5 years

Part B: Open ended questions

1. What are the requirements for a student to be registered in your school?

2. Why do you use those requirements in admitting students?
3. How do you assure quality when admitting students?
4. Are you aware of the MCDE admission policy?
5. What role does the MCDE play in ensuring that you follow its admission policy?
6. Do you think your admission practices helps students performance? Explain how?
7. As an academic staff, what do you consider are the things that make open and distance learning admission much easier?
8. As an academic staff, are there any innovations that are in place to support open and distance learning admission of your students?
9. What challenges do you encounter in implementing the admission policy in open secondary school?
10. What can you say on the coverage and effectiveness of the admission policy and strategies for developing and strengthening the open and distance learning in Malawi?
11. What other general comments do you have regarding the open and distance learning admission policy in your school?

Thanks for your cooperation

APPENDIX 2: Questions to guide OSS Students FDG

Introduction

This research is conducted only to meet academic purpose as part of completion of Master Degree Program. The researcher is a master's degree student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA) who is obliged to prepare a thesis in order to finalize his studies. The research aims to identify factors affecting students' performance in open and distance learning in Zomba Rural zone. The research shall also come-up with proposals for further actions with the aim of improving open and distance learning in Malawi. The findings of this study shall be useful to both, the researcher and other stakeholders that are working or interested in open and distance learning including the government. Thus your participation is highly appreciated; kindly respond to all questions with accuracy. All information provided shall be treated and used only for the stated objectives.

Part A: Demographic Characteristics

Please circle the appropriate response(s)

Gender: 1 = Male 2 = Female

Age range: 1 = Less than 20 years 2 = 20-29 years 3 = More than 30 years 3.

Class: 1= Form 1. 2 = Form 2 3 = Form 3 4 = Form 4

Last qualification: 1. = MSCE 2. = JCE 3. = PSLCE 4 = If any specify.....

1. How were you admitted into the open school?
2. Give reasons why you enrolled in open secondary school?
3. Would you prefer to enroll in day secondary school? Give reasons
4. If you wrote entrance examination were you shown your grades?
5. Do you think your previous qualification will help you in the current class?
6. What other general comments do you have regarding the open and distance learning in Malawi?

Thanks for your cooperation

APPENDIX 3: Questions to guide Host Head teacher interviews

This research is conducted only to meet academic purpose as part of completion of Master Degree Program. The researcher is a master's degree student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA) who is obliged to prepare a thesis in order to finalize his studies. The research aims to identify admission practices in open and distance learning in Zomba City. The research shall also come-up with proposals for further actions with the aim of improving open and distance learning in Malawi. The findings of this study shall be useful to both, the researcher and other stakeholders that are working or interested in open and distance learning including the government. Thus your participation is highly appreciated; kindly respond to all questions with accuracy. All information provided shall be treated and used only for the stated objectives.

1. Does the candidature for MSCE and JCE require a prerequisite qualification?
2. Explain why is that so? Whether its yes or no OR not sure
3. Are you aware of the NEP's admission policy to secondary education? The system employed in public secondary schools' admission is very well regulated by DSE.
4. What is your role in making sure that the NEP admission is followed in OSS?
5. The Maneb Act stipulates that your office is responsible for students' placement in secondary schools and you release lists of students to move to the next level of secondary education. Explain the factors considered in the placement process?
6. It seems DSE regulates the placement of students in Form 1 and Form 3 in mainstream secondary schools, which inherently means it also places students in open secondary schools. What measures do you take to make sure that the NEP admission policy is followed in open secondary schools?
7. What admission procedures were carried out in the pre-CDSS period (2002)?
8. Was there any kind of a role DSE played in the admission of MCE students?
9. How does DSE interact with MCDE AND OSS coordinators to ensure that the admission policy is adhered to?

APPENDIX 4: Questionnaire for MoEST official responsible for placement and admission issues

This research is conducted only to meet academic purpose as part of completion of Master Degree Program. The researcher is a master's degree student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA) who is obliged to prepare a thesis in order to finalize his studies. The research aims to identify admission practices in open and distance learning in Zomba Rural zone. The research shall also come-up with proposals for further actions with the aim of improving open and distance learning in Malawi. The findings of this study shall be useful to both, the researcher and other stakeholders that are working or interested in open and distance learning including the government. Thus your participation is highly appreciated; kindly respond to all questions with accuracy. All information provided shall be treated and used only for the stated objectives.

1. Does candidature for MSCE require prerequisite qualifications?
2. How has the ministry ensured that students who are enrolled in OSS have the requirements before they enroll?
3. The PSS system is self-regulated in the sense that schools are provided with lists of qualified of students to admit. The OSS doesn't have such a framework. Don't you think it makes implementation of admission policy susceptible to manipulation?
4. Why does quality assurance inspection not involve the OSS?
5. How does your ministry make sure that the MCDE is running smoothly?
6. What percentage of education budget does the ministry disburse to the MCDE? And how does that affect how certain i.e. admission policy implemented in OSS?
7. Does your office recognize that most OSSs are treated as income generating agents (for host schools and teachers) how does the ministry ensure that education as a greater good and implementation of policies are emphasized in OSS?
8. How does the ministry interact with the MCDE and OSSs to ensure that the admission policy (as per the NEP) is adhered to?
9. With the influx of OSS are there any differences with the era of MCE in terms of admission? Can you explain to me what the differences are?

10. If there are no differences why are there no changes and how effective is the current system in maintain the standards.
11. OSS and PSS aims to produce the same product, what do you suggest the MCDE do to ensure compliance to policies (ADMISSION POLICY) in OSS?
12. Any general comments on how your ministry runs, regulates policies in, and collaborate with the OSSs

APPENDIX 5: Interview Questions for MCDE official

This research is conducted only to meet academic purpose as part of completion of Master Degree Program. The researcher is a master's degree student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA) who is obliged to prepare a thesis in order to finalize his studies. The research aims to identify admission practices in open and distance learning in Zomba Rural zone. The research shall also come-up with proposals for further actions with the aim of improving open and distance learning in Malawi. The findings of this study shall be useful to both, the researcher and other stakeholders that are working or interested in open and distance learning including the government. Thus your participation is highly appreciated; kindly respond to all questions with accuracy. All information provided shall be treated and used only for the stated objectives.

1. Are OSS regarded as a form of formal schooling? What are the features that make them formal/non formal?
2. Why do we need the admission policy in the open secondary schools?
3. Was there any kind of a role MCDE played in the admission of MCE students?
4. What admission procedures were carried out in the pre-CDSS period?
5. How does it happen now? What are the similarities or differences?
6. How does MCDE ensure compliance of OSS coordinators to the NEP's admission policy?
7. (One of the aims of MCDE is to provide access to adults who did not have chance of schooling when they were young) DON'T you think the demand for prerequisite qualification compromises the whole idea of access to basic education?
8. What initiatives are taken to make sure that OSS coordinators and facilitators are oriented on the admission practices as per stipulated in the MCDE mandate?
9. How often do you provide training to policy implementers esp. in OSS?
10. How does the MCDE interact with the MoEST to aid the admission of students in OSS?
11. What do you think motivates OSS to enroll students without following the policy directions?

12. OSS and PSS aims to produce the same product, what do you suggest the MoEST do to ensure compliance to policies (ADMISSION POLICY) in OSS?
13. Any general comments on how THE MCDE runs, regulates policies in, and collaborate with the MoEST and OSSs