

**EXPLORING REASONS FOR STUDENTS' DROPPING OF BIBLE  
KNOWLEDGE AT SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN MALAWI:  
THE CASE OF BLANTYRE CITY SCHOOLS**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION IN CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES  
(SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION) THESIS**

**MODESTA WEZZIE SIMWAKA**

**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI**

**CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

**AUGUST, 2016**

**EXPLORING REASONS FOR STUDENTS' DROPPING OF BIBLE  
KNOWLEDGE AT SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN MALAWI:  
THE CASE OF BLANTYRE CITY SCHOOLS**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION IN CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES  
(Social Studies Education) THESIS**

**By**

**MODESTA WEZZIE SIMWAKA**

**B.Ed. (Humanities) - Domasi College of Education**

Submitted to the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in  
Curriculum and Teaching Studies (Social Studies Education).

**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI  
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

**AUGUST, 2016**

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

---

**Full legal name**

---

**Signature**

---

**Date**

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Maccloud Frank Salanjira, PhD (**Senior Lecturer**)

**MAIN SUPERVISOR**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Amos Chauma, PhD (**Lecturer**)

**CO-SUPERVISOR**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Esther Kunkwenzu, PhD (**Senior Lecturer**)

**DEPUTY HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my husband Archie Willie Malisita and my son Mwawi who always missed me during my studies and all those who have been instrumental towards my studies.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all people who assisted me to complete this thesis. In particular, special thanks to my supervisors Dr. M.F. Salanjira and Dr. A. Chauma for their untiring guidance towards the completion of this thesis. You were always available from the beginning to the end of the project. Thank you so much.

I also owe thanks to my husband Archie Willie Malisita for the inspiration and all the support he rendered to me during the study. Many thanks to Mr. Cosmas Goliati for his support. He was always available and ready to assist me during the whole process.

In a special way, I would like to give thanks to Scotland Malawi Partnership (David Livingstone Bicentenary Scholarships) for the support of tuition fees for my study. You really made my two-year academic journey easier. Thank you so much.

I also thank the South Western Division Manager for granting me permission to conduct the study. I am grateful to all the participants who made my study possible by accepting to provide me with data.

Finally, I thank the almighty God for giving me the gift of life and good health.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed at exploring reasons for students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level in Malawi after studying and passing it at junior secondary school level. The study used a qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm. It involved three categories of research participants namely; head teachers, Bible Knowledge teachers, and form three learners who studied Bible Knowledge at junior but dropped it at senior secondary school level. In all, there were five head-teachers, ten Bible Knowledge teachers and fifty form three learners who dropped Bible Knowledge. The participants cited mainly lack of career prospects, lack of teaching and learning resources, and shortage of Bible Knowledge teachers as some of the contributing reasons for the negative perception of Bible Knowledge. It is recommended that for the subject to be considered important by learners, curriculum developers should reconceptualise the Bible Knowledge syllabus for its relevance to the learner's career prospects and life-long learning to be clear. Secondly, Bible Knowledge teachers should assist learners to perceive the importance of Bible Knowledge as an academic subject, not a subject taught for learners' spiritual development. The aim of Bible Knowledge should not be perceived as converting learners to the Christian faith but developing the horizon of learners in understanding its relevance to some people's life and thought. The ministry of education should make sure that there are adequate resources for the effective teaching of Bible Knowledge. In addition, there should be qualified teachers for Bible Knowledge in all schools that offer this subject.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                            |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Abstract .....                                                             | v   |
| Table of contents .....                                                    | vi  |
| List of tables .....                                                       | x   |
| List of appendices .....                                                   | xi  |
| List of abbreviation and acronyms .....                                    | xii |
| <b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....                                                   | 1   |
| <b>BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</b> .....                                       | 1   |
| 1.0 Chapter overview .....                                                 | 1   |
| 1.1 An overview of the development of RE in Malawi from 1875 to 2015 ..... | 1   |
| 1.1.1 Religious Education in Malawi from 1926-1964 .....                   | 5   |
| 1.1.2 Religious Education in Malawi from 1964-2015 .....                   | 5   |
| 1.2 Motivation for the study .....                                         | 9   |
| 1.3 Problem Statement .....                                                | 9   |
| 1.4 Purpose of the study .....                                             | 11  |
| 1.5 Research question .....                                                | 11  |
| 1.6 Significance of the study .....                                        | 12  |
| 1.7 Structure of the thesis .....                                          | 12  |
| 1.8 Chapter summary .....                                                  | 13  |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....                                                   | 14  |
| <b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....                                             | 14  |
| 2.0 Chapter overview .....                                                 | 14  |
| 2.1 The role of Religious Education in society .....                       | 14  |
| 2.2 Issues contributing to students' dropping of Religious Education ..... | 16  |



|                                                        |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 2.3 Theoretical Framework.....                         | 31        |
| 2.3.1 The ecological systems theory .....              | 32        |
| 2.4 Chapter summary.....                               | 36        |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>                             | <b>37</b> |
| <b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>           | <b>37</b> |
| 3.0 Chapter overview .....                             | 37        |
| 3.1 Research design .....                              | 38        |
| 3.2 Research site .....                                | 40        |
| 3.3 Sampling procedure .....                           | 40        |
| 3.4 Data generation method .....                       | 41        |
| 3.4.1 In-depth Interviews (IDI).....                   | 41        |
| 3.4.2 Focus group discussion (FGD) .....               | 44        |
| 3.4.3 Document analysis .....                          | 46        |
| 3.5 Data analysis .....                                | 48        |
| 3.6 Data management.....                               | 51        |
| 3.7 Credibility and trustworthiness of the study ..... | 53        |
| 3.7.1 Piloting.....                                    | 53        |
| 3.7.2 Crystallisation .....                            | 54        |
| 3.7.3 Clarity of issues.....                           | 55        |
| 3.7.4 Verbatim quotes .....                            | 56        |
| 3.8 Ethical Issues .....                               | 56        |
| 3.8.1 Informed consent.....                            | 56        |
| 3.8.2 Confidentiality .....                            | 58        |
| 3.9 Limitations of the study .....                     | 58        |
| 3.10 Chapter summary .....                             | 59        |

|                                                                                                             |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>                                                                                    | <b>60</b>  |
| <b>PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....</b>                                                         | <b>60</b>  |
| 4.0 Chapter overview .....                                                                                  | 60         |
| 4.1 Factors contributing to students’ dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary<br>school level ..... | 61         |
| 4.1.1 Bible Knowledge is an optional subject at senior secondary school level .....                         | 61         |
| 4.1.2 The perceived difficulty of the Bible Knowledge examinations .....                                    | 66         |
| 4.1.3 Bible Knowledge is not an interesting subject.....                                                    | 70         |
| 4.1.4 Lack of perceived value of BK for students’ prospective careers .....                                 | 74         |
| 4.1.5 Perceiving BK as a subject for promoting faith not academic knowledge<br>among learners .....         | 80         |
| 4.1.6 Non- Christian learners are not comfortable with BK because of its<br>mono-faith nature.....          | 84         |
| 4.1.7 Lack of relevant teaching and learning materials for BK compared to other<br>Subjects .....           | 89         |
| 4.1.8 Shortage of professionally trained Bible Knowledge teachers .....                                     | 94         |
| 4.1.9 Parental influence and advice not to study Bible Knowledge .....                                      | 100        |
| 4.2 Chapter summary .....                                                                                   | 102        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>                                                                                   | <b>104</b> |
| <b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>                                                                 | <b>104</b> |
| 5.0 Chapter overview .....                                                                                  | 104        |
| 5.1 Conclusions.....                                                                                        | 104        |
| 5.2 Recommendations.....                                                                                    | 108        |
| 5.3 Areas for further research .....                                                                        | 110        |

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| 5.4 Chapter summary ..... | 111 |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....   | 112 |
| <b>APPENDICES</b> .....   | 121 |

## **LIST OF TABLES**

|                                                                              |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1: Number of students who took BK at JCE and MSCE (MANEB report) ..... | 25 |
| Table 2: Data generating instrument matrix .....                             | 47 |
| Table 3: Summary of codes generated from the data .....                      | 50 |
| Table 4: Themes of research findings .....                                   | 51 |

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

|                                                                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Appendix A1: Interview guide for BK teachers .....                                    | 121 |
| Appendix A2: Interview guide for headteachers .....                                   | 122 |
| Appendix B1: Focus group discussion guide for form 3 learners .....                   | 123 |
| Appendix C1: Permission letter .....                                                  | 125 |
| Appendix C2: Permission letter .....                                                  | 126 |
| Appendix D1: A sample of an extract of semi- structured interview for a BK teacher... | 127 |
| Appendix D2: A sample of an extract of semi-structured interview for a headteacher .. | 129 |
| Appendix D3: A sample of an extract of focus group discussion for form learners ..... | 131 |

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

|       |                                              |
|-------|----------------------------------------------|
| ATR   | African Traditional Religion                 |
| BK    | Bible Knowledge                              |
| BKT   | Bible Knowledge Teacher                      |
| CDSS  | Community Day Secondary School               |
| FGD   | Focus Group Discussion                       |
| GCSE  | General Certificate of Secondary Education   |
| HT    | Head Teacher                                 |
| IDI   | In-depth Interview                           |
| JCE   | Junior Certificate of Education              |
| KCSE  | Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education     |
| MANEB | Malawi National Examinations Board           |
| MoE   | Ministry of Education                        |
| MoEC  | Ministry of Education and Culture            |
| MoEST | Ministry of Education Science and Technology |
| MSCE  | Malawi School Certificate of Education       |

|        |                                                        |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| RE     | Religious Education                                    |
| RME    | Religious and Moral Education                          |
| SWED   | South Western Education Division                       |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Education Fund |

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter presents an introduction to the study on why students take Bible Knowledge (BK) at junior secondary level but drop it at senior secondary school level in Malawi using some selected schools in Blantyre city. Hornby (1995) defines dropping as withdrawing from a course of education or to stop doing something. In this study, dropping refers to students withdrawing from BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level. The chapter first provides an overview of Religious Education (RE) in Malawi from 1875 to 2015. This is followed by motivation of the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, structure of the thesis, and chapter summary.

#### **1.1 An overview of the development of Religious Education in Malawi from 1875 to 2015**

Religion has been and still is a part of people's lives and plays a major role in shaping the history of different societies in the world (Evans, 2008). Magesa (1997, p. 24) defines religion as, "a believing view of life, approach to life, way of life, and therefore, a fundamental pattern embracing the individual and society, [people] and the world,



through which a person sees and experiences, thinks and feels, acts and suffers everything....”

In order to preserve religious beliefs, rites, practices and values, each society uses education as a means or vehicle through which religious knowledge is communicated to people (Chidester, 2012; Nord & Haynes, 2014).

Bible Knowledge (BK) is one of the oldest subjects in the school curriculum of Malawi (King, 2004; Salanjira, 2003). During the colonial period the subject was known by different names such as Religious Instruction and Scripture or Religious Education (Nankwenya, 1977; Salanjira, 2003). These names were attributed to this subject because it was first taught in missionary schools and their main intention was to convert the learners to Christianity which means “religion based on the person and teaching of Jesus or its beliefs and practices” (Bastide, 1987, p.5). This is also described as confessional RE because it aims at leading the learners to a confession of or commitment to a given faith or religion (Hull, 2007). It is provided by faith or religious organisations. This form of RE involves indoctrination.

On the other hand RE can be offered with the aim of promoting an open-minded, critical, and liberal approach to the teaching of religion. This is described as non-confessional RE (Hull, 2007). It is a situation in which pupils are given freedom and responsibility to evaluate religion critically and then to follow the religion of their own choice. This freedom is in line with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Mudalitsa, 2000).

The aim of Religious Education (RE) was to instruct pupils in matters of Christian faith and doctrine. Hence, a confessional approach to Religious Education was used. Confession is any action by which the repentant manifest his sin (Tullock, 1993). In this study it is used to lead the learners into a confession of faith or helping them to grow in faith (Salanjira, 2009; Hull, 2007).

In general, a confessional approach is based on the conception of RE as a religious activity. In this approach, learners are expected to participate in the beliefs and practices of the religion being taught. This has been the traditional view of RE with the aim of leading the learners to a confession of and commitment to faith (Grimmitt, 2000; Hull, 2007; Ashton, 2003; Carr, 2006). Learners are either initiated into a faith and/or helped to grow in that faith. This approach was encouraged by the missionaries and Christians from the mainstreams of the Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations who were in control of teaching of RE in Malawian schools. Therefore, RE became an instrument of church evangelisation.

It was the general view of all the Christian missions in the country that education and Christianity were but one thing in that education was to sub-serve Christianity (Nankwenya, 1977; Salanjira, 2003). Such being the case, the aims of education were to be interpreted with the mind and the spirit of Christ, and followed up in its manifold implications for the individual and for the community. Molande (2004) adds that the aims of missionary education went as far as leading one to spiritual salvation beyond nurturing people's moral being. Students were encouraged to renounce their old ways of living

which were judged to be evil if they were either to be saved or to be considered civilised. Learners had to be taught with the view of converting them to Christianity and also producing teachers among them who would work as agents of evangelisation (Salanjira, 2009). The aim was to convert Malawians from primitive way of worshipping God and paganism to Western civilisation and Christian religion. Evans (2008) asserts that this Western civilisation was characterised by the Christian religion which was seen as a source of good values and concepts.

Therefore, colonial missionaries imposed Christianity on Malawians whose cultural beliefs and values were considered pagan (Molande, 2004). The aims of RE in the colonial era were to convert and nurture Malawians in the Christian faith according to Western ideals. Without questioning, the Malawians uncritically accepted whatever missionaries taught them in RE to help them develop moral and spiritual values. Hence, RE produced a religiously committed Malawians who appeared to be submissive followers of Christ. The teaching approach to BK was based on the authority of the Bible which was to be accepted without question. During the colonial era, the Africans and Malawians in particular were regarded as the recipients of an authoritative and divine word of God (Jarhall, 2001). There was no dialogue between BK teachers and students as far as the BK content were concerned. The BK teachers were always seen as masters of religious knowledge and learners as passive recipients of such knowledge.

### **1.1.1 Religious Education in Malawi from 1926-1964**

The colonial government did not become actively involved in the provision of education until 1926 when the first department of education was established (Banda, 1982). Banda also observes that with the coming in of government control and supervision, a new understanding arose. This time people began to think of education of a person for something wider than only the immediate needs of the missions (Banda, 1982). Education was now involved as total preparation of individual for their own good for them to live meaningful lives in the society. Learners could now attend any Christian mission school without being required to belong to the denomination whose school they attended (Salanjira, 2009). Prior to that, learners were expected to convert to the denomination or their parents were supposed to be members of that denomination and the teaching of the subject was done in a moralising way (Salanjira, 2009; Molande, 2004). However, even under the control by the Department of Education, RE continued to be based on Christianity (Banda, 1982) excluding Islam and African traditional Religions (ATR). Therefore, hegemony in the RE curriculum can be traced to the time Christian missionaries started establishing school in the 1870s, a trend that continued through the colonial and post-colonial period. The argument of the Christian faith communities was that churches established schools to teach the Bible apart from teaching other subjects and therefore, the Bible cannot just be replaced any how (Salanjira, 2009).

### **1.1.2 Religious Education in Malawi from 1964-2015**

Following independence in 1964, the educational system of Malawi inherited the teaching subjects that had been introduced by the colonial government, including the

study of the Bible. Malawi's Education Act determined the design and content of the RE curriculum and little has changed in this Act, and since then, RE continued to be mono-faith and Bible based (Salanjira, 2009). Although it is important to teach and emphasise morality in the teaching of RE, the current BK syllabuses seem to have a strong element of authority founded in Christian morality dictated by the authority of the Bible (Jarhall, 2001). Religious Education (RE) offered during the colonial period has influenced the current Malawi Bible Knowledge (BK) syllabus which consists of selected Bible passages as content to be covered in class with little or no reference to the learners' needs or to the learning activities in which learners are to be engaged. It was assumed that what had been designed was relevant to the learners regardless of their religious background (Ross, 1998). By the end of the 1980s, many educators were advancing arguments against the prevailing system of Christian and biblical instruction in the schools.

However, today BK is no longer taught in a confessional way. It is an academic subject but having some aspects that affects the moral behaviour of the students. The expectation is that students should change their behaviour after learning some of the Bible stories. This reflects the learning from religion approach (Hull, 2007). The aim of teaching BK is no longer to convert learners but to equip students with the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to function as responsible and productive citizens in the society. The knowledge, skills and attitudes gained help students to solve challenges such as environmental degradation, moral decay, corruption, drug and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, STIs, violence and juvenile delinquency. It helps learners to develop high moral standards of conduct and sound judgment. Biblical beliefs, skills and practices

assist the students to live in harmony with the spiritual and physical world. These also help the students to apply the Biblical principles in solving problems (Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST, 2012).

Phiri (1987) asserts that Religious Education, in general, aims at forming an integral human person, a balanced person, a committed person and a mature person. It leads a person to a vision and total liberation from all the vital dimensions of a person. In other words, RE is not supposed to ignore the personal growth of students but rather to be sensitive to issues of personal development (Chidester, Mitchell, Omar & Phiri, 1994). The primary aim is to introduce students to an important field of study. Like the study of politics, economics, or literature, the study of RE can interest, inform and educate students about a significant area of human activity.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education in Malawi introduced Religious and Moral Education (RME) as a multi-faith curriculum to replace BK as a mono-faith curriculum (Salanjira, 2003). “It was a continuation of the RE curriculum changes that had already taken place in primary school teacher training colleges in 1987 and primary schools in 1991” (Sookrajh & Salanjira, 2009, p.69). The mission of MoEST was to guide the provision of education for all Malawians so that they are able to pursue knowledge and skills, to manifest excellence in performance and moral uprightness, defend democratic ideals, and accept and value other persons on the basis of their personal worth and dignity, irrespective of gender, religion, ethnic origin, or any other discriminatory characteristic.

However, the majority of Malawians opted for the continuation of BK as opposed to multi-faith Religious and Moral Education (RME). Matemba (2011) adds that the subject is less understood aspect of modern education in Malawi. Since the attainment of democracy in 1994 with a liberal constitution, education in Malawi is focusing strongly on human rights and social justice (Salanjira, 2009). Through this democracy, the expectation is that Malawi's education system will help learners develop knowledge and understanding, skills values and attitudes which will enable them to be actively involved in building a just and democratic society (MoEST, 2012).

The form and content of religious education in Sub-Saharan Africa have been marked by the ideological concerns of different religious trends. This historical inheritance has also influenced the present situation of teaching of religion in government schools where, as a result of former control and in spite of recent innovations, Christian religious education still tends to be dominant. This led to the introduction of a dual mode RE curriculum in 2001 by Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) (O'Dala, 2001). This means using two parallel syllabuses, that is, for BK and Religious and Moral Education (RME). Despite all these changes, it has been noted that the students' enrolment to the subject at senior secondary school level is very low. For instance, statistics from MANEB show that in 2011 there were 76,591 students who sat for BK at junior level and the number was reduced at senior secondary school level to 29,917 in 2013. This shows that there is a decrease in enrolment at senior secondary school level (MANEB Report, 2014). It is for this reason that the researcher wanted to investigate reasons for students' dropping the subject at senior secondary school level.

## **1.2 Motivation for the study**

The impetus to research the topic arose from two main factors. First, having taught BK in secondary school for some time, the researcher has been exposed to problems existing in schools when it comes to the teaching and learning of BK as compared to the other subjects. For instance, the researcher has observed that BK is a subject that is allocated to teachers who did not specialise to teach BK whereas other subjects like Mathematics, Science and English, just to mention but a few, are usually taught by specialist teachers. In some cases teachers who are not trained to teach BK make no distinction between preaching and teaching because they fail to understand the professional nature of BK. In such cases the teaching of the subject takes the form of spiritual nurturing and indoctrination.

The second factor for the motivation was that the researcher also observed that most students were taking BK at junior secondary level but dropping it at senior secondary school level. It is this reduction in the enrollment in BK at senior secondary school level that served as the main factor for carrying out this study. The aim was to understand the reasons that influence students to drop BK. Such understanding may lead to an improvement in the way the subject is taught and learnt in schools for the number of drop outs to be reduced.

## **1.3 Problem statement**

It has been observed that in Malawi many students who take BK at junior secondary school level do not continue with it at senior secondary school level. In his annual



reports, the Chief Examiner for the subject (MANEB 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) expresses concern that the number of students who enroll for BK at senior secondary school level is getting lower and lower every year. However, reasons for that drop in students' enrollment have not been articulated in these reports. Furthermore, no study has been conducted to understand the reasons. So far one study on RE in Malawi tended to emphasise the influence of BK on the moral behavior of learners (Molande, 2004). Another study by Matemba (2011) focused on the comparison of RE in Malawi and Scotland. In that study one reason was given as to why learners do not take RE. This was lack of perceived career relevance of the subject. Salanjira (2003) examined the introduction and reception of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Malawi secondary schools, and in another study, Salanjira (2009) explored the contestation between BK as a single-faith RE syllabus and RME as a multi-faith syllabus using the voices of ministry of education officials, faith community leaders and head-teachers. Therefore, this study was carried out to fill the gap in literature on why students take the subject at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level.

The senior secondary school BK syllabus aims at giving learners an understanding of the scriptural basis of the Christian faith in order to help learners develop different skills in studying, interpreting and understanding scriptural passages. The syllabus also aims at helping learners to develop skills in understanding religious ideas and concepts as well as to encourage appreciation of Bible Knowledge's relevance to life and thought today (MoE, 1982; MoEST, 2012; Carr, 2008; Hull, 2007; Salanjira, 2009). Therefore, if

learners are dropping this subject, they lack some of these skills. As such learners need to be encouraged to study BK so that they gain these mentioned skills.

The focus is on equipping students with the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to function as responsible and productive citizens in society. The Biblical beliefs, skills, and practices assist the students to live in harmony with the spiritual and physical world. These also help the students to apply the Biblical principles in solving problems (MoEST, 2012; Chizelu, 2006). Therefore the concern is that if students continue to drop BK in their large numbers as is the case now, Malawi will have citizens who will not have some skills to help them solve challenges at hand. This brings in the need to investigate the reasons behind the students' dropping of the subject at senior secondary school level in order to gain further insights into the problem.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to explore reasons for students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level.

#### **1.5 Research questions**

In order to investigate reasons for the problem of student drop out for BK at senior secondary school level, the following main research question guided this study: Why do some students who take Bible Knowledge at junior secondary school level drop the subject at senior secondary school level? To investigate this question deeply, the following subsidiary research questions were used:

- a) What factors contribute to students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level?
- b) How do students perceive the relevance of Bible Knowledge as a school subject?
- c) What challenges do students face in learning Bible Knowledge in a multi-religious context?
- d) How can the challenges students face in learning Bible Knowledge be overcome?

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The study is significant in that it has provided insights into why students drop BK at senior secondary level in Malawi. This body of knowledge may help teachers who teach Bible Knowledge to improve their teaching. It may also provide a basis for curriculum developers to improve BK syllabus. The researcher also hopes that this study will stimulate further debate and research by those who are concerned with education and the teaching of Religion using a multi-religious educational approach.

### **1.7 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is presented in five chapters. The first chapter introduces and provides a background to the study. This is followed by a motivation of the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study and the chapter summary. The second chapter provides a review of literature on religious education which starts with the role of education to religious education in general and later explores the role of religion in a society. This is followed by a review of literature on some issues surrounding the students' dropping of RE in other countries and Malawi

in particular. The chapter ends with the theoretical framework as a guide to the study. The third chapter describes and justifies the research process including the research design and methodology while the fourth chapter presents an analysis of data and the findings of the study. Finally, in the fifth chapter the researcher makes conclusion based on the findings of study presented and discussed in chapter four, recommendations and suggested areas for further study.

### **1.8 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, attention has been given to the background to the study. This has been followed by motivation of the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study and it has ended with the structure of the thesis. The next chapter provides a review of literature on religious education which highlights the role of education to religious education in general and later explores the role of religion in society and issues surrounding the students' dropping of RE in other countries and Malawi in particular. The chapter ends with the theoretical framework which guided the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter provides a review of literature on religious education in general with the aim of locating the study in this body of knowledge. It identifies gaps in the current body of knowledge on the topic under study by indicating what has been said as well as the silences. This involved not only learning what work has been done but also being alert to research areas that have been overlooked (Bell, 2005). The review starts with the role of religious education in society. This is followed by a discussion of some issues surrounding students' dropping of Religious Education as a subject in other countries in general and Malawi in particular. The chapter also describes and justifies theoretical framework that has been used to theorise and interpret the findings of the study.

#### **2.1 The role of religious education in society**

For the reason that religion plays a significant role in history and society, study about religion is essential in understanding both the nation and the world. Conklin (1997, p.756) states that, "omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant". Failure to understand even the basic symbols, practices and concepts of the various religions makes much of history, literature, art and contemporary life unintelligible. Therefore, the study of RE is

also important if students are to value religious liberty, the first freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Moreover, knowledge of the roles of religion in the past and present promotes cross-cultural understanding essential to democracy and world peace (Paton, 2013).

The role of education, in general, is to promote the spiritual, moral and physical development of students and society and prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. Nord and Haynes (2014) give an example that in United States of America, under Supreme Court rulings, public schools clearly have permission to require that students learn about religion. Here Nord and Haynes (2014, p.18) observe that:

It might be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literacy and historic qualities.

Nord and Haynes (2014) further say that neither government nor this court can or should ignore the significance of the fact that a vast portion of the people believe and worship God and that many of the legal, political and personal values derive historically from religious teaching. A good education should provide students with perspective. It should give them some sense of what is truly important, some understanding of the sources of meaning in life. Yet, there is a concern that most learners do not take RE as a subject that can help them in their life. The reason, according to Hull (2007), is that the manner and extent to which RE is included in state education varies from country to country due to several factors and as such it is difficult to formulate a global perspective. Some of these

factors include, the religious affiliation of the society; whether mono-religious or multi-religious, the relation between the religious and the secular within each country, the historical tradition of each country and the conception about the nature and purpose of state school RE.

Religious Education makes a distinctive contribution to a balanced and broadly based school curriculum. Morrison (2014) explains that RE contributes to learners' personal development and well-being and to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. It encourages them to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually with their communities and as citizens in diverse society and global community by challenging to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics. In that way RE has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and long life learning (Chidester, 2012; Nord & Haynes, 2014)

## **2.2 Issues contributing to students' dropping of religious education**

Scholars have written on students' disliking RE in public schools and reasons for not offering RE. For example, Hughes, Butler, Kritsonis, Kritsonis and Herrington (2007; Ashton, 2003; Hirst, 1984) observe that many young people think that RE is appropriate for prospective clergy, but for no one else. This view of the purpose of education is then applied negatively to religious education. They go on to explain that in England, for example, students ask this question; why should I have to do RE? I do not want to be a nun; I do not like the uniform. Hull (2007) adds that most of the time a student will have

this kind of thinking when RE is taught as a single religion tradition. This is known as learning religion and learning about religion or confessional approach. In these two kinds of RE, religion is taught for its own sake, whether as an object of faith to which the children are summoned or as an object worthy of critical study (Ashton, 2003).

In addition, different scholars such as Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994), Hull (1984, 2007) and Summer (1996) have explored different approaches regarding the teaching and learning of RE. Wardekker and Miedema (2007, p. 76) observe that:

In the present time, the goals, content, and position of religious education in schools are by no means self-evident. Instead, religious education has become a prime example of an area of which even its right to exist is contested between various groups with an interest in education.

Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994) posit that some people conceptualise RE as a religious activity. In this case RE is aimed at leading the learners to a confession of and commitment to the faith. It initiates learners to a faith or help them to grow in that faith known as confessional RE. The aim is to produce committed member of each faith community (Salanjira, 2009). Hull (1984, p.284) also observes that conceptualising RE as a religious activity is:

The traditional view and it is probably safe to say that all past societies and in most present day societies, religious education has been understood as that process of teaching and learning by means of which religions have sought for their transmission and self-perpetuation.

The overriding concern is “to broaden, deepen, or enhance a student’s personal commitment to the beliefs, practices, and experiences of a particular religious tradition” (Chidesster, Mitchell, Omar & Phiri, 1994, p. 43). Carr (2008) adds that, the faith



communities in Africa adopted a confessional approach to RE to meet their ideological ends, which aimed at leading learners to a confession of, and commitment to, a particular faith. Therefore, this mono-faith and confessional approach to RE disadvantaged those who belong to different faith- communities or denominations.

In learning religion, teachers are expected to be believers in the religion themselves and the object of the instruction is to enable students to come to believe in the religion or to strengthen their commitment to it. This type of religious education may also be described as proceeding from faith to faith. Typically a specific religious group controls the curriculum and the methods of teaching rather than being controlled by the education system itself. However, this type of learning does not expand the cognitive horizons of the student, who is left with a single freedom whether to respond to the transmitted religion or not (Hull, 2007; Dove, 2013). This approach in public schools tends to be criticized for many reasons. One criticism is that it promotes indoctrination, which philosophers of education disqualify as an educational activity (Barrow & Woods, 2006; Hirst, 1974, 1984; Hirst & Peters, 1970). For instance, Hirst (1984, p. 260) observes that:

Philosophers of education have come to see religious education as aiming at pupils understanding of the claims and significance of one or more religions, not their acceptance and commitment to the beliefs and practices of any one's faith.

The learning religion or confessional approach is also criticised on the grounds that it can easily lead to exclusion of other faiths in the RE curriculum. This is against social cohesion and promotes divisiveness in a religiously diverse society by privileging one religion (Tan, 2008; Summers, 1996). Such privileging promotes hegemony of one faith

over the other faiths. Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994), Hull (2007), Summers and Waddington (1996) argue that it is the business of each religion to ensure its own transmission to the next generation. The public school should not be expected to do the work of the faith communities or families in promoting their respective religions or faith.

Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994, p. 42) observes that “where one religion is taught at the exclusion of other religions, RE is criticized for segregation against other religions, more especially in a democratic religiously diverse society.” Religion in schools should be taught for merely academic reasons just like any other subject included in the school curriculum. Therefore, a definition of RE as Christian education for example, might be defended on the basis of its role in legitimising the social order, its liberating potential, or its alleged reflection of the religious preferences of the majority of the population.

In learning about religion, religion is now taught as it were from the outside (Dove, 2013). The essential point is that the Bible is not taught as a religious book or as a sacred book of a certain community of faith, but as literature. This approach may be called 'learning about religion' because of its descriptive and historical approach. It tends to appear as a reaction against the mono-religious 'learning religion' situation and is often motivated by the desire to create a purely educational form of religious education, one which will not be open to the charge of indoctrinating or giving an unfair advantage to any particular religion.

Hull (2007) states that the disadvantage of this 'learning about religion' approach is that it tends to focus upon the content of religions and, therefore, the students are often not motivated to study it. Morrison (2014) adds that RE of this type tends not to grapple with the life-world of the pupils and often makes little or no explicit contribution to the pupils search for moral and spiritual values. However, it seems the literature is silent if at all the students dropping out of BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level is due to lack of motivation or otherwise and that is why the researcher deemed it necessary to conduct this research to establish the reasons.

Morrison (2014) asserts that learning about religion tends to be challenged, however when religious pluralism appear in the society. According to Morrison, when plurality in such formerly monolithic societies does appear, two possible reactions may be observed. First, religious education may be abandoned altogether and the state education system may become completely secular. When this takes place, it is expected that nurture into religious faith will be confined to the homes of the children or to the religious communities themselves. Second possible reaction is which may be described as pluralisation of learning religion in which students are offered a system of parallel instruction. In other words, children from each faith are educated in separate classrooms and receive instruction from a representative of that faith. For example, Muslim children are educated by the Muslim teachers, the Orthodox children by the Orthodox teachers and others. This variation of the learning religion and learning about religion approaches are faith-based which seeks to present various religions, but still from the point of view of

one religion. It is upon faith in that one religion that these approaches are based, although they attempt to be plural on this basis (Hull, 2007; Walters, 2010).

Furthermore, other scholars subscribe to the conception of RE as an educational activity. This is also known as multi- tradition approach. Hull (1984) points out that the teaching of RE should no longer be confessional. It should be liberal for the learners to develop the appropriate religious literacy for a pluralistic society. RE for public schools now should be designed to help learners understand religious diversity and to promote dialogue across different religious communities.

Carr (2008) posits that the conception of RE as an educational activity leads to non-confessional approach. It can easily lead to multi- faith RE by drawing its content from many faiths. This is being described as liberal RE since its intention is to help learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion, what it means to be a member of a religion, and how religion affects the world and the society in which we live, with emphasis on religion as a social phenomenon (Holm, 1975; Smart, 1998; Steyn, 2004).

Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994) add that the teaching of RE as an educational activity has the potential of helping learners to develop social and life skills such as the clarification of values, civil toleration of differences, and cultural literacy. This conception asserts that the point of teaching religion is education, not faith. Furthermore RE based on this conception can draw its content from one religion as is the case with BK in Malawi. However, it can be criticised as giving learners a narrow perspective of religion in the midst of many faiths. Thus, although mono-faith RE can be non-

confessional, a multi-faith RE has a greater potential to be non-confessional because it promotes knowledge of religion as a dimension of personal and social life of many, if not most, people in society. Such knowledge is promoted by studying many religions (Steyn, 2004).

Moore and Perker (2004) observe that, like other academic subjects in the curriculum, religious education must concentrate on developing basic skills in observation, listening, reading, writing and thinking and also ensure to be free from religious discrimination. As such the public school has a special role to play in relation to religion which is different than that performed by the church and mosque. Therefore, when RE is offered as educational activity, educators rather than clergy must take the lead in developing coherent curricula, producing text book materials, and training teachers in this area of study (Grimmitt, 1978; Holm, 1975; Wood, 1984). However, Hull (2007, p. 4) argues that in “RE as educational activity emphasis is placed on learning about religion rather than the life-world of the learners which is emphasised.”

Carr (2008, p. 670) proposes that RE should be linked or integrated “with other school subjects in arts, humanities and sciences.” He is criticizing the teaching of RE as a separate subject in the school curriculum without showing any meaningful links with other school subjects. This is important in promoting more educationally religious literacy. It can also have the potential to promote a holistic view of religion as an important dimension of human and social life. To that effect, Carr (2008, pp. 670-671) argues that “offering RE as a separate subject is inappropriate for the general run of

pupils-precisely in so far as this serves to undermine or obscure understanding of the relevance of religious study to other studies and vice versa”.

Hirst and Peters (1970) and Hirst (1974; 1984) claim that for any subject to be included in the school curriculum it must be justified on educational grounds. By justification on educational grounds, they mean that any subject must contribute in a unique way to the aims of public education. This unique contribution can be made by helping learners to develop critical knowledge and understanding of the world and society in which they live. Peters (1966) continues to argue that education is concerned with initiating learners into what is school curriculum.

However, it should be noted that RE has educational rather than explicitly religious aims worthwhile. RE must be justified by transferable skills that students develop such as disciplined imagination, reading comprehension, writing ability and critical thinking, and by the desirable social ends such as expanding understanding, increasing tolerance and reducing prejudice, that can be served by this field of study within the and objectives. Therefore, in principle, RE is not designed to serve religious needs directly even though many students will find that such a programme indirectly provides an opportunity for deepening their faith, advancing personal growth or making informed choices in their religious lives. RE in public schools should serve public interest.

Related concerns are raised in other countries such as England, Scotland, Zambia, Kenya and Somalia among others (Nyawira, 2012; Chizelu, 2006; Matemba, 2011). In these

countries, the subject is given the name of RE and not BK as it is the case in Malawi. In this case BK is within the RE.

However, in these countries literature has revealed some of the reasons why students do not take RE. As observed by Nyawira (2012) and UNICEF (2013) in Kenya and Somalia respectively some of the reasons are; introducing the RE subjects as an optional subject. The other reason is that teachers are reluctant to teach the subject. For example, in Zambia and England this problem was seriously noted (Chizelu, 2006; Carmody, 2004; Paton, 2013). In other cases the RE is being taught by non-specialist teachers. This problem in one way or another has put students off for taking the subject as it was noted by Paton (2013) and Matemba (2011) in England and Scotland respectively.

In Malawi, literature is silent on why students drop the subject at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level. Evidence from MANEB according to statistics, the number of students enrolling for BK at senior level is getting lower and lower every year (see table 1). Molande (2004) and Matemba (2011) agree that as students go higher up the ladder, fewer and fewer of them enroll for the subject but reasons for these low enrollments are not mentioned.

**Table 1: Showing the number of students enrolled for BK at Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) and Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) from 2009 to 2011 and 2011 to 2013 respectively.**

| JCE  |                | MSCE |                 |
|------|----------------|------|-----------------|
| YEAR | NO.OF STUDENTS | YEAR | NO. OF STUDENTS |
| 2009 | 72456          | 2011 | 30153           |
| 2010 | 76328          | 2012 | 30029           |
| 2011 | 76591          | 2013 | 29917           |

**Source: MANEB Report, 2014**

Those students who sat for BK at JCE in 2009 were supposed to sit for MSCE in 2011, but there was a decrease in number. This is the same with the subsequent years. The table illustrates the decrease in number of students who sat for BK the whole Malawi.

Paton (2013) conducted a study in the United Kingdom to find out reasons why religious education is increasingly marginalized in schools. Paton found out that students are dropping out RE because the subject is being ‘edged out’ of the timetables by General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) reforms. This made many students to lose interest in the subject. Growing numbers of teenagers were forced to drop GCSEs in religious studies because of the introduction of new style league tables that prioritise other disciplines.



In some schools, pupils were no longer allowed to take RE at all in the last two years of secondary education. However, by prioritising other subjects, schools discouraged pupils from sitting GCSEs in RE and that will have a ripple effect for younger age groups. If a school is not really promoting RE as a subject at GCSE then specialist teachers are going to be discouraged from joining and is only going to impact on how the subject is delivered for other pupils (Paton, 2013; Ream, 2009).

The researcher also found out that the equivalent of 900 states secondary schools were axing the subject at GCSE to find more time for other disciplines. Many people back compulsory lessons in RE up to the age of sixteen. As a result, schools are cutting the number of specialist teachers placing lessons in the hands of untrained staff and steering students away from taking qualifications in the subject. This is to convey the message that RE is of less value than other subjects. So teachers are concentrating more, as they have been told to do by government, on core subjects and subjects that can be measured (Paton, 2013; Ansari & Martin, 2001).

This problem is similar to what Matemba (2011) found in his comparative study of religious education in Scotland and Malawi with special reference to developments in the secondary school sector. Matemba found that in Scotland there is shortage of specialist teachers so much so that many schools are employing non-specialists to teach RE. He also noted the same problem in Malawi that there was serious understaffing almost to crisis point in BK. By the time he was conducting the study; most teachers especially in Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) were not qualified to teach in secondary

schools. That is why the teaching of BK was also affected. However, Matemba did not indicate that this understaffing and the use of non-specialist teachers contribute to the students' dropping of the subject at senior secondary school level in Malawi. This study therefore was intended to find reasons for students' dropping of BK in Malawi at senior secondary school level.

The perception is that the core subjects are helping students to find better courses. Morrison (2014) affirms that the subject is increasingly marginalised, unloved and taught by non- specialist at a time when teaching about religion has never been more important. Morrison continues to argue that many of the divisive issues people face today are coated in religion, whether it is those that divide a community, such as abortion or gay marriage or those that give rise to conflicts between societies. If ever there has been a time when an understanding of belief and the role it plays in people's lives is important, it is now. And yet it is the time when countries do not recognise RE as an important subject and has been excluded from the core subjects. However, this did not provide reasons for dropping RE as a subject by learners at senior secondary school level in Malawi.

Furthermore, Dove (2013) observes that reduction in the number of students enrolling on RE is because students are responding to messages from governments about where their future employment are to be. For example, the governments and colleges encourage courses of science technology, engineering and mathematics as they are responding to economic imperatives both locally and nationally. This is not far from what is happening in Malawi where science subjects are now made compulsory to all students at secondary

school level. This is a deliberate move to ensure that the education sector nurtures science and technology, to have a technologically driven nation. This was confided by the Minister of Education public relations officer (Ngwira, 2014). This is coming at a time when dropout rate of BK is already high. The researcher wanted to find out the impact of this move when students are already dropping BK as subject.

Ream (2009, p. 4) points out that, “when public schools fail to mention matters of religion in any way, they fail to educate students well: religious students are left wondering about the significance of their own faith, and students who are not religious are left without any real education about the religious beliefs and practices around them”. Ream contends that public schools are more likely to evade their responsibility to provide their students with complete educations than they are to offer religious indoctrination. Therefore, it is argued that RE is a powerful force in both history and the contemporary world, if students are going to be prepared to live in this world then religion is relevant to virtually all subjects of the curriculum. So if the students are dropping the subject that means there is no completeness in their preparation to live in this world. In Malawi when the Ministry of Education introduced RME to replace BK, the majority of Malawian opted for BK rather than RME (Salanjira, 2009; Matamba, 2011). Surprisingly, the subject which the majority of Malawians opted for is the one that is having low enrollment of students especially at senior secondary school level. Hence, the researcher wanted to find out the reasons for this low enrollment.

In other countries, the cause for students' dropping of RE is that teachers are reluctant to teach the subject. This has led to the dropping of the subject by some students. For example in Zambia, through the study done by Chizelu (2006) in which he investigated why RE teachers tend to be reluctant to respond to the Ministry of Education directive to apply their subject using multi-religious educational approach. The findings revealed that the RE teachers' reluctance to respond to the Ministry's directive was a result of their different perceptions which are mostly influenced by their religious affiliations and the syllabi they use. For example, the majority of the RE teachers involved in the teaching of RE in secondary schools are Christians, therefore, they were reluctant to teach RE that also includes non-Christian religions because they felt it would compromise their consciences and their own faiths. As a result, they preferred to teach the subject from a Christian stand point. This approach differs from the Ministry of Education directive to teach RE from a multi-religious perspective. Chizelu (2006) notes that because of this reluctance by teachers to teach the subject, many students were discouraged from studying the subject since there was no encouragement from teachers.

Paton (2013) noted a similar problem in England where teachers were reluctant to teach RE because they were unsure of what they were trying to achieve in the subject hence steering students away. This is also similar to what Matemba (2011) found in his study that in Malawi teachers were reluctant to teach RME because they were not aware of it since they were not equipped to it. However, Matemba does not link teachers' reluctance to teach RME and students dropping of BK at senior secondary school level in Malawi.

The study carried out by Nyawira (2012) in Kenya in which she was investigating reasons why Christian religious education is taught in Kenyan schools today, indicates that many students are dropping RE because they are given freedom to study the subject or not. Smart (1998) asserts that introducing RE as optional subject has contributed to reduction in the number of students enrolling for the subject since students are free to study it or not. For example, in Kenya only ten percent of students are studying RE at Kenya Certificate of secondary Education (KCSE) level.

This problem was also observed in Somalia in a research carried out by UNICEF (2013) in which they investigated educational services in Somalia. The findings were that the country is dominated by Muslims who opt only for Islamic education rather than Religious Education where some other religions are included. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Education in Somalia decided to make the subject optional. As a result, only a few students are enrolling for RE. The reason behind their argument is that they do not see any career prospects in studying the subject.

Chakanza (2000) observes that Muslim parents who do not want to expose their children to the likelihood of converting to Christianity opt to keep their children away from those schools controlled by Christians. Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994); Hull, (2007) Summers and Waddington (1996) concur with Chakanza to say that although increasing numbers of Muslim students are attending government schools, many Muslim parents remained suspicious of the role of Christian instruction in the curriculum. However, the researcher does not want to assume these reasons as those that can be

linked to Malawi situation without empirical evidence. Thus, it was deemed necessary to do this study.

In Malawi, the situation is not very different from what was experienced in Kenya. The subject is optional but the literature is silent as to why students do not like the subject especially at senior secondary level after taking it at junior secondary school level and pass, sometimes with good grades. As earlier alluded to, Matemba (2011) mentions that the perception that the students in Malawi have is that those who choose RE are people with low academic merit and thus incapable of pursuing for example core science subjects. However, this is not convincing because those that choose core subjects most of them fail the subjects as compared to a few who take BK at senior secondary school level.

Molande (2004), Matemba (2011), and MANEB Report (2013) agree that RE, which in the case of this study is BK, is marginalised by learners as they go higher up the ladder of their education. But the reasons behind this marginalisation or drop out of the subject in Malawi are not articulated.

### **2.3 Theoretical framework**

This study has employed a theoretical framework based on the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The theory describes and explains sources of possible factors that may affect a person's development or behaviour. In general, this theory posits that a person's development or behaviour in society is affected by factors emanating from

different levels of the society or the environment as a system. This section describes this framework and justifies why and how it has been used to theorise why students take Bible Knowledge at junior but drop it at senior secondary school level. It is argued that just as influences on people's behaviour or development come from different levels or sources of the society, reasons for students dropping of BK emanate from different sources in the society in which they live. The subsequent sections describe the various levels of the ecological systems theory and justify how the theory has been used to explain the findings of the study.

### **2.3.1 The ecological systems theory**

This theory explains that a person's environment can be divided into four different systems reflecting the level of the source of influences affecting each individual. These are the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem, (Oswalt, 2008; Biedinger, 2011). Factors affecting a person's development or behaviour can originate from any of these levels. This theory has been used in this study to explain the various sources of reasons as to why some learners take BK at junior secondary school level and drop it at senior secondary school level.

The *microsystem* is the first level of Bronfenbrenner's theory. It is the system closest to the person and the one in which one has direct contact. Oswalt (2008) observes that microsystem is the small environment the child lives in. Some examples would be home, school and neighbourhood. This is where the most direct interaction takes place, for example, through interaction with teachers, parents and peer group (Harder, 2014).

Biedinger (2011) adds that both parents and teacher's positive aspirations for their children or good relationship between parents and children or teachers and students, especially teenagers, has a strong relationship with academic achievements.

Relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional. In other words, your reactions to the people in your microsystem will affect how they treat you in return. The individual is not the passive recipient of experiences in these settings but someone who actually helps to construct the social settings (Danner, 2009; Freire, 2000; Fisher, 2000; Fisher; 2006; Freire, 1970). This is the most influential level of the ecological systems theory. The more encouraging and nurturing these interactions are, the better the child will be able to grow. It should also be noted that the makeup of the child's personality also has an influence on the interaction coming from these organisations and individuals.

Secondly, the *mesosystem* is the next level of ecological systems theory. It refers to the relationship between different parts of the Microsystems and how they work together for the good of the child. For example, the relationship of family experiences and the school experiences, school experiences to church experiences and family experiences to the experiences of a peer group (Harder, 2014). It could be that children who reject a positive student teacher relationship may have experienced rejection in the family environment. This means mesosystem is where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently, but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another. These interactions have an indirect impact on the individual (Sincero, 2012). Hence, this theory suits well in explaining reasons why some students drop BK at senior



secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level. For example, it will help to reflect the relationship that is there between the family where the student is coming from and the school which is offering BK to the same student.

One aspect of a students' mesosystem would be the relationship between his parents and his teacher. His parents take an active role in his school, such as paying school fees and buying books for him and encouraging him. This has a positive impact on the student development because the different elements of his microsystem are working together. A student development could be affected in a negative way if the different elements of his microsystem were working against one another (Garson, 2008; Oswalt, 2008).

The third level is the *exosystem* which refers to a setting that does not involve the person as an active participant, but still affects him indirectly anyway (Garson, 2008). This includes decisions that have a bearing on the person, but in which they have no participation in the decision-making process. An example would be a child being affected by a parent or a teacher receiving a promotion at work or losing their job. Oswalt (2008) and Sincero (2012) point out that a child's anxiety has an effect on his development in other areas, even though he has no interaction with his father or teacher's work or say in the decision making process. This is also true where a teacher is being motivated with incentives such as good houses, workshops and promotions among some, in one way or another will affect the students' learning and performance. Sadker and Sadker (2003, p.21) point out that "every dollar spent to increase teacher

qualifications improves students' academic performance more than money invested in other areas." If teachers are not well managed and do not get the right incentives to stay on their jobs, children will lose their teachers to the private sector, other professions and other countries (Peters, 1970).

The fourth and final level of the ecological systems theory is the *macrosystem* which deals with influences emanating from the largest and most remote people and things that have an influence over a child's life (Danner, 2009). It is the culture in which individuals live. Oswalt (2008) says that the economy, wars, religious beliefs and cultural values and the relative freedoms they provide all play their part in this system. There is a positive and negative influence on the child from the macrosystem.

These different forms of systems therefore can be used as a theoretical lens to look at and interpret the reasons why some learners take BK at junior secondary school level and drop it at senior secondary school level as they develop into individuals who will play a major role in the development of their society. As a teacher of BK, the researcher feel that the environment which surrounds a child really influence the child's decisions and choices. A child's decisions may be influenced by a home, church or school experiences for example. All these institutions have got their own beliefs and customs. As a result, a child's decisions and choices emanates from such beliefs.

Therefore, the researcher feel this theory will really help to explain reasons why some students drop BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary

school level. Biedinger (2011) asserts that a child's education success is positively impacted by home learning opportunities such as parents reading to their children, helping them to choose courses among some. On the same, Tan (2008) points out that a student's learning success is enhanced when both parents and teachers clearly state their goals for students' performance.

Thus, it is the argument of this chapter that in theorising the findings of the study, an ecological systems theory can be used to interpret the reasons for students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary level. The reasons come from different levels of the society as a system. From these levels, students experience different pressures which make them drop the subject after passing it at junior secondary level.

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided a review of literature on Religious Education with a focus on the role of the subject in general. Some gaps why students drop RE in Malawi and other countries have been identified through the literature review. The chapter has described and justified ecological systems' theory as its theoretical framework used to explain and interpret the findings of the study in chapters four and five. The next chapter describes and justifies the research design, focusing on the methodology and methods which were employed to generate and analyse data. The last part of the chapter outlines how data was analysed and the limitations of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter describes and justifies the research design, focusing on the methodology and methods which were employed to generate and analyse data. This is a qualitative study which aims at understanding and explaining rather than predicting human behaviour (Babbie, 2001; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). In this sense this qualitative has explained the reasons influencing student's tendency or behaviour of taking BK at junior secondary and dropping it at senior secondary school level. It first describes and justifies the design of the study, selection of the sample and the data generation methods that were used. This is followed by a section on the ethical considerations that were followed throughout the study. The last part of the chapter outlines how data were analysed and the limitations of the study.

There were three categories of participants; learners who dropped BK at senior secondary school level. These learners were a mixer of girls and boys ages ranging from fifteen to eighteen. There were also both male and female BK teachers. However the larger number was for female teachers. For example, out of ten teachers who participated, six were females and four were males. Most of these BK teachers have undergone theological

courses hence lack of expertise in imparting BK content. Out of the total number of BK teachers, two had bachelor's degrees in theology and the other six had diplomas in theology. The remaining two had diplomas in other subjects such as Biology and Geography hence considered as volunteers. These were BKT 4 and BKT 7. There were also five headteachers. Nine headteachers had bachelor's degrees in other subjects and only one headteacher had a diploma in theology, this is HT 3.

### **3.1 Research design**

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.28) define a research design as a “flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and method of collecting empirical material.” Similarly, Babbie (2001) refer to research design as the researchers plan on how to proceed with the study. It locates researchers in the practical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups or wherever materials for interpretation of the study are available.

In this case a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study because it enabled participants to say, in their own words, what matters to them and why. Furthermore, qualitative research provides a forum for participants to express diverse beliefs or views (Van Manen, 1979; Patton, 2001; Creswell, 2009).

The researcher employed a phenomenological approach or methodology within an interpretive paradigm to investigate reasons for students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level. This study

employed an interpretive paradigm because of its emphasis on experience and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Van Manen, 1979; Creswell, 2009).

In defining phenomenology, Van Manen (1990, p.10) observes that, “Phenomenology ask for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a ‘thing’ what it is- and without which it could not be what it is”. Thus phenomenology seeks to employ the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a particular person or a group of people (Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990; Borgdan & Biklen, 1992). It helps to clarify how research participants perceive a social phenomenon, describe it, feel about it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others (Patton, 2002).

Thus, this study used a phenomenological perspective to understand and describe the experiences of teachers who teach BK and learners who took BK at junior secondary school level and dropped it at senior secondary school level and head teachers. The nature of interpretive paradigm made it possible to conduct this study. The use of phenomenology helped to bring to the fore the reasons why some students take BK at junior but drop it at senior secondary school level, using their experiences and perceptions as well as from their own perspectives. Within an interpretive paradigm, the study interpreted the views (interpretations) of the participants as to why students drop BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level in Malawi.

### **3.2 Research site**

The study targeted five Secondary Schools in Ndirande Cluster in Blantyre city, South Western Education Division (SWED). Most of these targeted secondary schools were easily accessible to the researcher by public transport and that because the researcher lives in Blantyre. Again, the researcher chose five schools so as to have more head-teachers, teachers and learners to participate in the study. The researcher also wanted to compare data that was solicited from more than one school as this tends to add credibility of the study findings and conclusion.

### **3.3 Sampling procedure**

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), sampling refers to the process of selecting a portion of population under study. In this study, purposive sampling was used. This type of sampling refers to judgmental sampling that involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain participants to include in the study (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research, individuals are selected to participate based on their firsthand experience of a phenomenon of interest. In this case the sample was selected with that purpose in mind.

Richardson (2000) and Van Manen (1990) explain that in qualitative approach, purposeful sampling is used so that individuals are selected because they have experienced the central phenomenon. It means they have some defining characteristics that make them the holder of the data required. In this study, five head teachers of schools offering BK, ten teachers who teach BK and fifty students who dropped BK at senior secondary school after taking it at junior secondary school level were purposively

selected because they were the ones who had the essential characteristics of giving reasons for students' dropping of the subject. This purposive sampling helped the researcher to gather the intended data for the study.

However, with purposive sampling method the selection criteria, can be very arbitrary and are almost always subjective (Richardson, 2000; Patton, 2001). Purposive sampling can be highly prone to researcher bias. In this study, the researcher tried as much as possible to avoid biasness by selecting only those who had the defined characteristics or capacity of giving required information.

### **3.4 Data generation methods**

There are several data generation procedures for a qualitative study. Any tool for gathering data provides one picture of the social world, thus different methods enrich understanding on what is going on (Creswell, 2009; Stringer, 2004). In this study, the researcher used the following data generation methods; interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis.

#### **3.4.1 In-depth interviews (IDI)**

An interview is a two way conversation in which the interviewer asks the research participants questions in order to generate data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In qualitative interviews, the world is seen through the eyes of the participants and valuable source of information, provided they are used correctly (Tylor & Bogdan, 1984). The aim of



interviews is always to obtain rich descriptive data that will help the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study.

The researcher used semi-structured interview questions to conduct the in-depth interviews with BK teachers and head teachers. According to Wisker (2008) semi-structured interview questions allow space for some divergence with the interviewer, then returning to the semi-structured interview question (see appendices A1 and A2 for interview guides).

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used to corroborate data from other data sources (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail (Stringer, 2004; Creswell, 2009). The interviewer has the freedom to probe the interviewee to elaborate on the original response. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) argue that events cannot be understood unless one understands how these events are perceived and interpreted by people who participate in them. It is in this respect that interviews helped the researcher understand the Head teacher and teacher's reasons on students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level.

The researcher carried out a total of fifteen face to face interviews with the participants in the study. Out of fifteen participants, ten were teachers who teach BK in the visited schools and five were Head teachers. The teachers were selected from both junior secondary school level and senior secondary school level. Interviewing these participants enabled the researcher to understand their reasons on students' dropping of BK at senior

secondary school level, after taking it at junior secondary school level. The interviews with all these fifteen participants were conducted individually with at least thirty minutes with each. Before conducting an interview, the researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the study and clarified the issues that needed clarification. This enabled the researcher to generate the correct information from participant's point of view.

The advantages of using interviews are that it allows the clarification of points, probing and elaboration of responses. Interviewing attracts a relatively high response rate and there is control over the order of questions. This means that respondents have no opportunity to know what question comes next or to alter the order the questions they answer (Sarantakos, 2005). In addition, interview makes it possible to measure what a person knows, what a person likes or dislikes and what a person thinks. As such interview is a useful way of getting large amounts of data. Appendices D1 and D2 shows a sample of how interview transcript looks like.

However, interviewing has got some disadvantages. For instance, according to Sarantakos (2005), the respondent may not be interested in the research topic or not agree with the research objectives. In addition, interviewing offers less anonymity than other methods since the interviewer knows the identity and other personal details of the respondent. Interviews are also affected by the interviewer factor and the possible bias associated with it just to mention a few.

To overcome these problems, the researcher did not force anyone who did not want to participate. The interview was conducted at a time most suitable to the respondent. Overall, the researcher showed interest in the research topic and in the respondents, avoided bias and leading questions as well as suggestive questioning. Nieuwenhuis (2007, p.88) concludes that, “good interviewers are good listeners who do not dominate the interview and understand that they are there to listen.” So in this study, the researcher did not take shortcuts by only hearing what she wanted to hear, never was she judgmental and never criticised, argued and disagreed with her respondents.

### **3.4.2 Focus group discussion**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a discussion focused on a particular topic on which debate, arguments or conflicts are encouraged (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Focus group discussion strategy is based on the assumption that interaction will be more productive in widening the range of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing information.

The researcher conducted focus group discussion with learners in order to produce in-depth qualitative data. The nature of the research questions which were open ended, allowed participants to express their views freely without obstruction (see Appendix B1). This enabled the researcher to obtain holistic in-depth reasons for students’ dropping of BK at senior secondary school level in Malawi (Creswell, 2009). In all there were five focus groups, one at each school. At each group, there were ten participants who dropped

BK at senior secondary school level. At least thirty minutes was allocated to each discussion. These discussions were done at each visited school once.

The advantages of FGD are that it produces data rich in detail that is difficult to achieve with other research methods. Participants were able to build on each other's ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews. Unexpected comments and new perspectives can be explored easily within the focus group and can add value to the study (Creswell, 2009). Appendix D3 shows a sample of an FGD. In order to reduce lengthy transcription, some repetitive responses and mannerism were removed. All words which were spoken in local language other than English have been translated into English. This was duly confirmed by the participants.

However, the disadvantages of FGD are that some participants experience focus groups as threatening and might make them hide their real opinions. Domination of the discussion by some members might affect the direction and outcome of the discussion. The findings may not be representative because focus group samples are typically small just but to mention a few (Sarantakos, 2005). To overcome some of these challenges the researcher encouraged full participation and interaction among members and also used probing to steer the discussions or to clarify aspects, but tried to remain in the background.

### **3.4.3 Document analysis**

Document analysis was also used as one of the methods of generating data in this study. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Richardson, 2000). Analysing documents incorporates coding content into themes similar to how focus group or interview transcripts are analysed. For example, in this study, the documents that were analysed are the MANEB BK Chief Examiner's reports for both JCE and MSCE. The advantage of document analysis is that it provides good source of background information and at the same time bring up issues that may not be noted by other means (Richardson, 2000).

Documents are a useful source of evidence but they have their limitations. Gall, Gall and Borg (2003, p.156) point out that, "Documents have differential survival rates and those which survive do not always provide all the information required.... The answers to many questions are simply not available, since the necessary records either never existed or failed to survive".

However, the researcher in this study used the information that was available, which in this case was the MANEB BK Chief Examiner's reports on Bible Knowledge for both JCE and MSCE from 2009 to 2013. This was linked with the data that was generated from the participants using other methods. The area of focus was to find reasons why some students drop BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level.

The researcher also did audio and video recorded interviews after getting consent from the research participants. A part from recording, the researcher took down notes. After the interview, the researcher replayed the recorded information and reviewed the field notes taken down. This helped to identify if there were some gaps (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). What the participants actually said was transcribed word by word for the purpose of data analysis.

**Table 2: Data gathering instruments matrix**

| <b>Research questions</b>                                                                                                                              | <b>Data source/method</b>                                                                                              | <b>Procedure</b>                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the reasons for the students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview</li> <li>Focus group discussion</li> <li>Document analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher conducted face to face interview</li> <li>conducted focus group discussion with participants</li> <li>Evaluation on Chief examiners' reports</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do learners perceive the relevance of Bible Knowledge as a school subject?</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview</li> <li>Focus group discussion</li> <li>Document analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher conducted face to face interview</li> <li>Conducted focus group discussion</li> <li>Evaluation on document analysis</li> </ul>                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What challenges do students face in learning Bible Knowledge in a multi-religious context?</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview</li> <li>Focus group discussion</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher conducted face to face interview</li> <li>Conducted focus group discussion</li> </ul>                                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can the challenges students face in learning Bible Knowledge be overcome?</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview</li> <li>Focus group discussion</li> <li>Document analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher conducted face to face interview</li> <li>Conducted focus group discussion</li> <li>Evaluation on document analysis</li> </ul>                          |

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The process of data analysis according to Creswell (2009, p.183) “involves making sense out of text and image data”. In qualitative research data analysis is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions and writing memos throughout the study. A researcher is interested in understanding how things occur (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Creswell, 2003). When analysing qualitative data the goal is to summarise what have been seen and heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that will help understanding and interpretation of what is emerging. Creswell (2003) stresses that in qualitative studies data analysis begins immediately after data is generated. This ensures that the activity is focused and prevents a researcher from being overwhelmed with voluminous data generated.

In this study, in analysing data, the researcher followed the analytical procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Marshall and Rossman (2006) as follows: first by transcribing data generated from participants through face to face interview and focus group discussion. The researcher listened to the audio material at the same time following the transcribed data in order to have a rich representation of transcribed data. This was followed by familiarising myself with data and coding the data using in vitro codes (words introduced by myself) but reflecting on participant’s point of view. Apart from in vitro codes, the researcher used in vivo codes (exact words spoken by the participants). Later on, the coded data was critically analysed to find out if they had some differences and similarities. Categories were also generated as well as themes. Later on, themes were reviewed, offering interpretations through analytical memos to find out if they were

having some differences and similarities. This was followed by defining and naming themes, searching for alternative understanding and finally writing the thesis according to themes.

The aim behind the process of analysing data was to bring together larger data into broader category. Those sharing similar characteristics were assigned a broad category. Strauss and Corbin (1998) posit that broader categories have the power to explain and predict phenomenon. The categorising of data made it more manageable and easy to interpret.

For purposes of anonymity, codes have been used for the research participants involved in this study. For the students who participated in the study through focus group discussion, codes ranging from FGD 1 to FGD 5 have been used. In the case of the ten teachers of Bible Knowledge who participated in the study through semi-structured interviews, codes ranging from BKT 1 to BKT10 have been used. In addition codes ranging from HT1 to HT5 have been used for the five Head teachers of the schools which were involved in the study. The result of the intensive coding resulted into generation of seventeen codes. Table 3 shows a summary of all codes or ideas generated from qualitative data.



**Table 3: Summary of codes generated from the data**

|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| BK optional at MSCE           |
| Emphasis on sciences          |
| Peer pressure                 |
| No job prospects              |
| Inadequate materials          |
| Scarcity of information       |
| Too much work                 |
| Lack of career guidance       |
| Teaching not impressing       |
| Teacher shortage              |
| Lack of teacher incentives    |
| School culture and management |
| Parental advice               |
| Biased time table             |
| Subject biased                |
| University demands            |
| Discouraging results          |

The activity of data analysis with the guidance of the theoretical frame work yielded nine themes that are presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Themes of research findings**

|                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.Bible Knowledge is an optional subject at senior secondary school level                  |
| 2.Perceived difficulty of the Bible Knowledge Examination                                  |
| 3.Bible Knowledge is not an interesting subject                                            |
| 4. Lack of perceived value of the subject for students prospective career                  |
| 5.Perceiving BK as a subject for promoting faith not academic knowledge among learners     |
| 6.Non Christian learners are not comfortable with subject because of its mono-faith nature |
| 7. Lack of relevant teaching and learning materials compared to other subjects             |
| 8. Lack of trained BK teachers and teachers' reluctance to teach the subject               |
| 9. Parental influence and advice                                                           |

### **3.6 Data management**

Interviews and focus group discussions yield a lot of raw data in the form of audio data and notes taken. Therefore, it is imperative to keep this data in manageable form. Operations that ensure systematic and coherent process of collecting data, storage and retrieval constitute data management (Punch, 2009). Among other reasons, data management ensures high quality accessible data and retention of associated analysis after the study. Supporting data management activity, Wolf (1992) in Punch (2009)

stresses that storage and retrieval of data is the heart of data management in that without clear working scheme data can be miscoded, mislabeled, mislinked and misled.

In this study, data from interviews and focus group discussions was transcribed verbatim, typed and saved in a computer, in the researcher's e-mail account, flash disks and two CDs for back up. In addition, a hard copy was produced for safe keeping. Further, the research contact summary form which provided a summary of core issues generated from any form of contact with the participants was produced. Apart from the contact summary form, the researcher also had a document summary form on which she summarised issues noted in the documents that were accessed.

However, there were some challenges during data analysis. The most difficult part, in as far as data analysis is concerned, was the transcribing of data that were generated from FGDs. This was the case because the data were generated in vernacular and it was too much to transcribe word for word. Such being the case, The researcher tried to transcribe the data immediately after generating it for one FGD before conducting another one to avoid the accumulation of work. The other critical challenge was to come up with categories and themes that could help to analyse the findings of the study. However, after coming up with categories and themes, the researcher used a critical friend to assess them if they really reflected responses to the problem under study.

### **3.7 Credibility and trustworthiness of the study**

Credibility is an assurance that the researcher's conclusions stem from the data. Trustworthiness refers to the way in which the inquiry is able to persuade the audience

that the findings in the study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of high quality (Hinckley, 2005). To ensure credibility, the researcher used piloting, crystallisation, verbatim quotes and involved critical friends.

### **3.7.1 Piloting**

The researcher used pilot study which according to Sarantankos (2005, p. 256) is “a small-scale replica and a rehearsal of the main study” In qualitative study pilot study aims to establish whether the respondents are accessible, whether the site is convenient, whether the plan is well constructed and whether any changes or adjustments are needed. Therefore, the researcher used pilot study to estimate the cost and duration of the main study, to test the suitability of the research methods, to test responses of the subjects to the overall research design and to familiarise with the research instruments and environment. This means that all data gathering instruments were piloted to test the time taken to complete answering the questions of the instrument, to check whether the questions were clear or not and revised accordingly. This process ensured that the researcher generates valid data (Bell, 1993).

In this study after using the instruments, it was discovered that some questions were giving direct responses and some were responding to the problem under study after a probing question. However, other research questions were not clear to the participants even after paraphrasing the questions the respondents still had problems to give responses. As a result, such questions did not answer the problem under study and were removed from the guidelines and replaced with other questions. During focus group

discussion with learners, it was noted when students were asked questions in English, they did not respond. Almost all of them remained quiet. However, after interpreting the questions in Chichewa all students were comfortable to participate. As such all the questions during focus group discussion were in Chichewa. The researcher could not force them to respond in English because one of the ethical considerations is that respondents should speak or respond in the language in which they are comfortable.

### **3.7.2 Crystallisation**

The researcher also established credibility by applying crystallisation to the qualitative data. This enabled the researcher to see several issues as to why students drop Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level after studying and passing it at junior secondary school level. It allowed for the creation of a variety of views from the data. Richardson (2000) states that crystallization enables a shift from seeing something as fixed and rigid to multi-dimensional object or phenomenon; allowing for infinite variety of shape, substance, meaning and angles of approach.

Crystallisation provides rich, thick descriptions and gives the researcher multiple ways of understanding (Creswell, 2007). The same experience is interpreted in different views so much so that it gives the researcher a deeper level of understanding. For example, in this study, the same problem of investigating reasons why students take BK at junior secondary school level and drop it at senior secondary school level was investigated using different methods. For example, face to face interview, document analysis and focus group discussion were used. The phenomenon under study was interpreted and

understood in different ways. However, researchers must be open-minded and willing to appreciate a wide range of representation. The researcher did her best to produce findings that are believable and convincing. Negative findings are also being presented to add to the credibility of the study.

The researcher established trustworthiness by involving critical friends, to review findings, ask questions, criticise and offer help where ever possible just to prove that the results are not her own ideas but ideas of several people and also to ensure that the findings are accurate and dependable (Creswell, 2009). In addition, the researcher used references to show that the work is supported by the ideas of other people from the literature and appreciate what others have said. Using references also shows the authenticity of the information and that the work has been written in academic manner.

### **3.7.3 Clarity of issues**

During the study, any matter that participants felt were misrepresented was immediately corrected. This provided an opportunity to clarify some of the issues obtained. The participants were given chance to listen to the recorded interview to check whether there was any form of misrepresentation of facts.

### **3.7.4 Verbatim quotes**

The study has also included quotations from participants' transcribed data to reflect what participants actually said. This is the word for word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of the recorded words (Bell, 1993). Since

communication has a lot of components other than words such as laughter, pauses, and hand gesture among some. Verbatim transcription captured all these in order to give a true reflection of what had been said.

### **3.8 Ethical issues**

Research ethics is about being clear about the nature of the agreement a researcher has entered with research participants. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) state that a researcher who carries out the research should always act in an ethical manner and have respect and concern for the dignity and welfare of the people who are participating. This means that in this study a researcher had the responsibility for ensuring that a study was conducted ethically. To ensure ethical issues are adhered to, the researcher took into consideration informed consent and confidentiality.

#### **3.8.1 Informed consent**

Some of these ethics include the acquirement of the individual's consent before generating data. Rudestam and Newton (2007) assert that all researchers will be aiming at the principle of informed consent which requires careful preparation involving explanation and consultation before any data generation begins.

In this case, in order to gain access to the area of study, the researcher first got a letter of introduction from the University of Malawi, Chancellor College's Head of Curriculum and Teaching studies Department stating the intent of study. The letter was dully

presented to the office of Education Division Manager where the researcher was given another letter permitting her to carry out the study (see appendices C1 and C2).

The researcher visited the schools and presented the letters to the Head teachers. She further explained to the Head teachers the purpose of her study. Then requested the school Heads to participate in the study, all school Heads were very willing to take part. The Head teachers consulted teachers and the teachers consulted the students. During the meetings the researcher requested them to feel free to participate or not. The researcher got assurance from the participants that they were willing to participate in the study after briefly explaining to them the objectives of the study and nature of the study (Creswell, 2009). This was one of the most important tools for ensuring commitment of the participants during research.

Participants were given chance to ask questions for clarity. The significance of doing this was to ensure that participants know exactly what would be involved in the research so that they could voluntarily participate (Creswell, 2009). It is disrespectful to compromise people's autonomy by not allowing them to decide for themselves whether they see value in participating in a research study and whether they are willing to tolerate and associated risks (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The researcher further requested for permission to record the information the participants provided. During this process, all participants verbally accepted to take part in the study.



### **3.8.2 Confidentiality**

In a qualitative study, it is important to protect the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. This entails that during this study the researcher made all the names of the participants anonymous and that there is no any element that might indicate their identification. Further, the study used pseudonyms for names of schools (Stringer, 2004). The following were the pseudonyms for schools, school A, school B, school C, school D and school E.

All participants' information and responses shared during the study would be kept private and treated with strictest confidentiality. They were also told that the information was for academic purposes only. All recordings will be destroyed after the study is completed. The significance of hiding the identities of the participants is to protect them from any harm because of their participation (Bell, 2005). However, considering that this is a qualitative study, the participants were known to the researcher.

In addition, the researcher made sure that participants are not exposed to any undue physical or psychological harm (Hinckley, 2005). In this case, the researcher strived as much as possible to be honest, respectful and sympathetic towards all participants.

### **3.9 Limitations of the study**

The study focused only on the perspectives of students who dropped BK in Blantyre city, teachers of BK and head-teachers of the schools in which the study was conducted in some selected secondary schools in Blantyre City. The researcher anticipated that

participants' availability would be a problem since each school and each individual has got different commitments, also considering that the main study would be conducted in the months when the national examinations for forms two and four would be in progress. This was true; most participants were not available on the agreed time and day. Some of them could postpone meetings for almost a month. The researcher was patient and adjusted to their programmes and she tried to plan together with the participants as to when they would be available.

### **3.10 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, attention has been given to research design and methodology of the study. In addition, it has described interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis as the methods that were used to collect data. It has further described the sample and sampling procedures, credibility and trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations that were used. The chapter has outlined how data were managed and analysed to come up with categories and themes that were useful for making sense of the large volume of textual data generated. Finally, it has pointed out the limitations of the study. In the next chapter, the researcher will present the study findings and discuss them based on the themes generated from the study. In addition, the findings are examined against previous related literature and the theoretical framework presented in chapter two.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter presents and discusses findings on why some secondary school students in Malawi take Bible Knowledge (BK) at junior but drop it at senior secondary school level. The reasons are given according to the perspectives of the BK students themselves, their BK teachers and their school head teachers. The findings are interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as its theoretical framework as described and justified in Chapter Two. The findings are presented in a form of themes of reasons given by the three categories of the research participants involved in this study. All data with the same idea are summarised in one theme. This means the data generated from all five the schools have not been presented separately. In all, the reasons fall under nine themes namely: BK is an optional subject at senior secondary school level; perceived difficulty of the BK examination; BK is not an interesting subject; lack of perceived value of the subject for students' prospective careers, the perception of BK as a subject for promoting faith not academic knowledge among learners; non- Christian learners are not comfortable with subject because of its mono-faith nature; lack of relevant teaching and learning materials for BK compared to other subjects; lack of professionally trained BK teachers; and finally parental influence and advice not to study BK.

#### **4.1 Factors contributing to students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level**

In all, there were nine factors which emerged from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data. These factors explain why students took Bible Knowledge at junior but dropped it at senior secondary school level. This section presents and discusses such factors within the theoretical of framework based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as described in chapter two. The overall argument is that the students' decision to drop the subject was influenced by factors that came from several levels of the society. Pseudonyms have been used for schools to uphold the ethical principle of anonymity. Where responses are in Chichewa and translated into English, Chichewa is italicised. English is italicised where the responses are in English only.

##### **4.1.1 Bible Knowledge is an optional subject at senior secondary school level**

One of the factors that contributed to students' dropping of Bible Knowledge was the optional nature of the subject. Some of the research participants explained that the students dropped BK at senior secondary school level because they were not given a chance to choose the subject at junior but were allowed to do so at senior secondary school level. For instance, in two out of five schools, all form one and two students were told to take the subject while in other schools the students took the subject because they were allocated to a form stream or block where Bible Knowledge was offered as a compulsory subject. However, at senior secondary school level, the students were given a chance to choose among other optional subjects or were allocated to a form three stream where BK was offered as an optional subject.

For example, two learners in a focus group discussion had this to say:

I dropped BK because at JCE I was forced to take it but it was optional at MSCE. If BK was optional at JCE, I would not have studied BK right from the beginning because I am not interested in it. *[Ine ndinayisiya BK chifukwa pa JCE ndinakakamizidwa kuyitenga koma pa MSCE amatiuza kuti tisankhe. Pakanakhala kuti pa JCE panali mpata wosankha sindikanayitenga BK kuchokera pachiyambi chifukwa ndilibe nayo chidwi]* (FGD2, School B).

Another student commenting on the optionality of BK had this to say in a focus group discussion:

The problem is that the school management just allocates subjects to streams at MSCE, for example Form 3A will take BK and Form 3B will take Agriculture. Had it been they give chance to students to choose on their own at least a good number of students would have been taking BK. You may wish to take it but the time there is BK in the other class, you are also in class, making it difficult to attend BK class. I dropped BK because the school forced me to go for Agriculture *[Vuto ndilakuti akuluakulu apa sukulu pano amagawa wokha maphunziro pa MSCE, mwachitsanzo, Form 3A mutenga BK ndipo Form 3B mutenga Agriculture. Pakanakhala kuti amatisiya kuti tizisankha tokha ana ambiri bwenzi akumayitenga BK. Koma mmene zilimu ukhoza kumayifuna kuti uphunzire koma nthawi imene ku kalasi lina kuli BK mwina ku kalasi lako kuli phunziro lina, ndiye zimakhala zovuta kuti ukaphunzire nawo. Ineyo ndi mmene ndinayisiyira BK chifukwa sukulu inandikakamiza kutenga Agriculture]* (FGD 5, School E).

On the same issue of allocating students to streams, one head teacher observed that:

*One major reason for students' dropping of BK at senior level is that at junior secondary school level they are being forced to take the subjects. It is like whether they want or not they will take all the subjects. Now when they go to Form 3 and Form 4 they drop because there are chances of dropping the subjects and BK is regarded as elective subject. Most students have got a tendency of dropping BK since it is not a core subject (Interview, HT 3, School C).*

It can be argued here that some students dropped the subject not because of their personal choice but due to the choices made by the school management as they were allocated to classes that did not take BK. The option for BK was made by the school on behalf of the students. This can be described as an option imposed by school management. From the perspective of the ecological system theory, it can be argued that the main factor contributing to students' dropping of the subject was from the exosystemic level in which the school is located. As Garson (2008) argues, the *exosystem* refers to a setting that does not involve the person as an active participant, but still affects them indirectly anyway. This includes decisions that have a bearing on the person, but in which they have no participation in the decision-making process (Garson, 2008).

The optional nature of BK as reason for students' dropping the subject, some, eight BK teachers who participated in this study observed that since BK is not compulsory at senior secondary school level, most students are likely to drop it in large numbers for different reasons. For example, one BK teacher explained that:

*At senior secondary school level, students themselves have a chance to choose the subjects because the requirement is that they can take only up to eight subjects. Therefore, they find it very easy to drop subjects like BK because it is already an elective subject (Interview, BKT 1, School A).*

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this factor of optionality has influenced the policy makers in the Ministry of Education who represents the larger society. The insight is that learners are not forced to take or drop BK but are free to make their own personal choice whether or not they want to study the subject. This optionality of BK at senior secondary school level has also been highlighted by Nyawira (2012) in

her study in which she investigated reasons why Christian religious education was taught in Kenyan schools and why students tended to drop it at senior secondary school level. Her findings indicate that many students dropped the subject because they were given freedom to choose the subject or not. In Somalia a study carried out by UNICEF (2013) investigated how educational services are offered in the country. One of the findings was that, the Ministry of Education's policy of offering Religious Education (RE) as an optional subject, because the country is dominated by Moslems resulted in only a few students enrolling for the subject.

In the context of Malawi, as noted from the reasons provided by different participants and other scholars, it can be argued that making the BK subject optional contributes to the students' dropping the subject at senior secondary school level. It should, however, be pointed out that the manner in which the subject was made optional was different from one school to another. For example, in one of the five schools involved in this study, the students were allocated in a form 3 class where BK was not offered. In one school in Form 3A, BK was offered while in Form 3B, it was not offered. In that case, a student in Form 3B whether he or she liked the subject or not, would not take it. In other schools, the optionality of the subject started from Form 1 up to Form 4. Thus, all those students who were allocated to Form 1A were taking BK up to Form 4 while those in form 1B were not taking BK up to form 4. In other two schools, all students took BK in Form 1 and 2 because there was only one class. In such a case, BK was offered as a compulsory subject at junior but at senior secondary school level the students were given chance to

choose the subjects they wanted. Since BK was already an elective subject, they found it easy to drop it.

On the same, some students at senior secondary school level were allocated to a class in which their teachers felt the students could do better in other subjects rather than BK despite the students desire to continue with BK at that level. This means some students were allocated to a form three class where BK was offered depending on how they had performed at junior secondary school level. Thus, those who were not allocated to a BK class, found themselves dropping the subject although it was not their intention. This can be described as optionality of the subject imposed by school management. According to the ecological systems theory, it was a factor emanating from the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garson, 2008).

It can be argued here that according to the ecological systems theory, some of the reasons could be described as microsystem in the sense that they came out of the personal choice of the students to drop the subject. However, some reasons were from the mesosystemic in the sense that it was the school's policy that put the students in a situation of dropping the subject. In other cases the national policy itself that BK should be optional created room for the students to drop the subject in form 3 although they had taken and passed it in forms 1 and 2.

It can be argued that the main contributing factor or reason, according to the participants in this study, was the Ministry of Education's policy of putting the subject into the



category of optional subjects. This was also highlighted in one of the MSCE BK Chief Examiner's Reports in which it was observed that to a certain degree the Ministry of Education plays a role in the decrease of the candidature for BK examination by not placing BK among the core subjects (BK Chief Examiner's Report, 2013).

The optional nature of the subjects as a reason emanates from the macrosystem level of the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner which deals with the influences that come from the larger society. The theory describes the influence of culture in which individuals live. A child, his or her parent, his or her school, and his or her parent's workplace can exert some influence on the behaviour and choices of the students. The influences of these cultural contexts in a society can have on the child a positive or negative impact. In this case, the policy by the Ministry of Education represented the larger society which placed BK into the category of optional subjects. As a result, it had brought negative influence on the students who drop the subject in large numbers.

#### **4.1.2 The perceived difficulty of the Bible Knowledge examinations**

The other reason given by some of the research participants was that BK was perceived to be difficult, especially during examinations. This perception was a result of peer pressure. Most participants mentioned that their fellow students encouraged them to drop BK at senior secondary school level because at that level, the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) asks difficult questions and most students who continue with it, do not do well. Some BK teachers had this to say:

*Students hear from their friends that BK is difficult at senior secondary school level. They feel they cannot take it because it is difficult. They have negative attitude especially with the book of Isaiah. Their perception is that Isaiah is difficult. I think they get all this information from their fellow students that Isaiah is difficult. The unfortunate part is that the book of prophet Isaiah is taught at the beginning of Form 3, learners lose interest and decide to drop the subject (Interview, BKT 9, School E).*

On the same issue of difficultness of the BK examination, another BK teacher said:

*Learners have a perception that BK examinations are difficult at senior level basing on the book of prophet Isaiah because it is divided into three parts and you will find that some parables students find them difficult to understand what they really mean or what Isaiah is trying to portray in the message. As a result they find it very difficult and decide to drop the subject. Sometimes they may drop even before learning it in Form 3 because of what they hear from their friends. In most cases it is through peer pressure that they drop the subject (Interview, BKT 7, School D).*

In support of this reason that BK examinations are difficult, three students from focus group discussions said:

*I dropped BK because it is a difficult subject and I did not pass with good grade at JCE. MANEB ask questions basing on the Bible verses of which it is difficult for me to remember. It was easy to understand when the teacher was teaching and I studied hard, but I did not get the grade I wanted. This forced me to drop the subject. [Chifukwa chimene ndinayisiyira BK ndichakuti, BK ndiyovuta kwambiri. Ine pa Form 2 m'mene ndinayilemba sindinayikhoze bwino ayi. A MANEB amafunsa ma verse kwambiri, koma timakhala tilibe ma baibulo ndiye pamakhala povuta kuti tiziganizira ma verse oti ali mu baibulo. Ndiye ndimati ndikaphunzira muja, ndinkamva koma kuti ndilembe mayeso ndimalephera. Ndimalimbikira kuwerenga koma osakhoza mmene ndinkafunira, ndi chifukwa chake ndinangoyisiya] (FGD1, School A).*

Another student had this to say in a focus group discussion:

*I dropped BK because it is a difficult subject mainly when it comes to reciting the Bible verses. In an examination you are required to answer question basing on a given chapter which you failed to recite the verses. You are expected to give exact answers from the chapter for example who*

said this and where? To me I feel this is very difficult. *[Ine ndinasiya BK chifukwa ndinawona kuti ndiyovuta. Zimakhala zovuta kuti munthu uloweze ma verse. Chifukwa pa mayeso pamabwera zoti chapter chakuti panachitika zakuti zakuti. Ndiye munthu kuti ukale ndi nthawi kuti uziloweze kuti chapter chakuti panakambidwa zachani, ndiye zimakhala zovuta kuloweza, zimakhala zovuta kwambiri. Ndiye amafunanso uziyankha ndendende zimene zakambidwa pamenepo. Mwachisanzo; ananena mawu awa ndani? Kapena zimenezi zinachitikira kuti? Ndyie ndizovuta]* (FGD3, School C).

Furthermore, on the difficulty as the reason for dropping Bible Knowledge, another student observed that:

I dropped BK because it is more difficult than other subjects. There are a lot of names to be memorized and I do not understand of what use these names will be in my everyday life. Worse still, in an examination, you are asked to mention some of these names which are very difficult to memorize. Should they consider minimizing the use of names in examinations, then BK can be a subject of my choice. I recommend they remove the names because I do not know their importance. *[Ine ndinasiya BK chifukwa ndiyovutirapo. Mukamaphunzira muja mumapezeka kuti muli maina ambirimbi. Ndiye penapake umazifunsa kuti eee, kutsogolo zidzandithandiza chiyani. Ndiye mayeso akanakhala kuti sanena zakuti tchulani wakuti wakuti anthu bwezi BK akumayitenga. Chifukwa ukangolakwitsa zina la wina wake ndiye kuti walakwa. Ndiye mayina a anthu akale anali wovuta kwambiri. Ndiy mwina akanachotsa mayinawo chifukwa enafe sitiwona kufunikira kwakuti azinena kuti analankhula ichi ndani? Nanga m'moyo wanga ine zidzandithandiza chiyani, ndichifukwa ndinawona kuti ayi ndingosiya]* (FGD5, School E).

Thus, in view of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the difficulty of the subject was being noted in different ways. The students were taking active role in dropping the subject. Apart from having difficult examinations, the subject had no specific books to study. Considering that BK covers a study of many selected passages from different books of the Bible, it makes it difficult to study the subject. Commenting on the difficult nature of the subject, one head-teacher observed that:

*Students feel BK is difficult because they do not have specific books to use. At junior secondary school level they study many biblical books. For them to take a bible as it is and start studying, they find the subject very difficult.*

*They go for examinations while they already have that perception that BK is difficult. That is why most of our students do not do well. So when they go to Form 3 they have that perception that BK is difficult and they drop it (Interview, HT2, School B).*

This factor was also mentioned in one of the BK Chief Examiner's Report that there is indeed a general tendency of discouraging students from taking BK at senior secondary school level by teachers and fellow students on the basis that the subject is difficult (BK Chief Examiner's Report, 2013).

As observed from the reason given, the presumed difficulty of the subject has contributed to the students' dropping of BK at senior after taking it at junior secondary school level. However, other learners perceive the difficulty nature of the subject in different ways. Others perceived it difficult during the teaching and learning of the subject; others, during the examinations while others just heard it from their fellow students. The subject is already an elective subject and then it poses to be difficult. This gives more room for the students to drop it. Most participants had noted that BK examinations were difficult. However, some participants said that they were just told by their fellow students that the subject is difficult at senior level without them actually experiencing it at that level, hence dropping the subject due to peer pressure. Only a few, experienced the difficulty of the subject at junior and were discouraged by the results, hence they did not want to continue with it.

From the perspective of the ecological systems theory, this reason is emanating from the microsystem level. It is the system closest to the person and the one in which they have

direct contact and where the individual is not the passive recipient of experiences in these settings like home, school and neighbourhood, but someone who actually helps to construct the social settings. Apart from being discouraged by their peers that the subject is difficult, many students mentioned during FDGs that they dropped BK as a result of poor performance during the national examinations at junior secondary school level.

However, peer pressure and discouraging results alone, are not reasons enough to drop the subject because each and every subject is not easy on its own. As a result, learners need to work hard in order to pass that particular subject and one need not base his or her decision on rumours, as is the case with most students. The truth is that what is perceived difficult to one person is not difficult to the other. Therefore, students might have another reason for taking BK at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level as is discussed in the next theme.

#### **4.1.3 Bible Knowledge is not an interesting subject**

Most participants in this study reported that a good number of students took BK at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level because the subject was not interesting. They pointed out that the subject has a lot of information to be taught and learnt within a short period of time before writing national examinations. For example, one BK teacher had this to say:

*Students have got that mentality that information subjects are boring. They hate BK and if you go to class you find that they are just few students in the class. They have that mentality that BK is not interesting because it is just too much. What they opt for is that they go to mathematics, physical science even if they do not pass them but they make sure they study them and drop*

*subjects like BK just because have too much information. Of course, at junior level, the content is too much. There is a lot of information about prophets... (Interview, BKT2, School A).*

This reason was supported by one BK teacher participant who said:

*The reason why students leave BK at senior secondary school level is that learners lose interest because the content is too much. So according to the time that is allocated on the time table to teach BK is not enough. Sometimes we are only given two periods per week which is not enough to cover the syllabus because the syllabus is wide. (Interview, BKT6, School C).*

Emphasising the same reason, one head-teacher observed that:

*Students want fewer notes. They do not want to study too much. This is the main reason that I think they drop the subject. They would say that the subject is too long. They say that the amount of work to be covered is too much. So they lose interest in the subject. BK involves reading and once you have poor reading culture you cannot take BK. Some students are lazy they do not want to read (Interview, HT1, School A).*

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the Ministry of education is in the macrosystem level which represents the larger society. It has influenced the students' dropping of the subject by coming up with the syllabus which has too much content. According to the findings, another reason why students take BK at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level is that the subject is not interesting in terms of having too much notes. For instance, learner participants from two FGDs had this to say:

*BK has a lot of information. Had it been the Bible was well summarised I would not have dropped it. We do not have enough time to read the whole information. There are a lot of notes to be covered. This makes the subject to be boring and not interesting. [BK muli notsi zambiri. Kwa ine akanakhala kuti baibulo lija amatipatsa mwachidule, ndikanayipitiriza kusiya ndikukopa baibulo lonse. Notsi zija ndizambiri, timafika nthawi ya mayeso notsi za ma book ena sitinamalize chifukwa chochepa kwa*

*nthawi. Nthawi yayitali ku JCE timangokhalira kulemba notes. Ndiye phunziro lake silimasangalatsa ayi] (FGD 5, School E).*

Commenting on many books of the Bible studied in BK and which contribute to the difficult nature of the subject, another student said:

There are a lot of books to be studied at JCE level. It becomes difficult to read all the books when you are preparing for examinations. You sometimes forget what you read. This reduces interest in the subject. For instance, at JCE we read books from Genesis up to New Testament. That is why at MSCE I dropped it, I thought it will be the same as at JCE. *[Ku JCE ma bukhu amakhala ambiri. Ndiye kuti onsewa uwadziwe, zimakhala zokuvuta umatha kukhala ndi nkhwawa, mwinanso pa mayeso paja kulephera chifukwa zinthuzo unayiwala chifukwa zinachuluka. Zoterezi zimapangitsa subject imeneyi isamasangalatse. Komanso ku JCE timaphunzira zinthu zambiri, kuyamba Genesis mpaka ku New Testament. Ndichifukwa chake nditafika form 3 ndinayisiya ndimaona ngati kuti zikhalanso zomwezo](FGD 3, School C).*

This reason that the subject is not interesting was also indicated in both JCE and MSCE BK Chief Examiner's Reports. The Chief Examiners noted that most teachers do not cover the syllabus fully. Responses from candidates during national examinations showed inadequate coverage of the syllabus since the syllabi are very wide. The reports also agree that students are not performing well during examinations due to lack of reading culture. BK is an information subject and it requires somebody to keep on reading the bible and understand it well. Students' poor performance is linked to lack of interest in the subject. The Chief Examiner expressed concern that there is a serious need to revamp BK to make it interesting subject (BK Chief Examiners' Report, 2013, 2014).

From the reviewed literature, scholars have mentioned some reasons for the reduction in the number of students who take BK or RE as they go up the ladder of secondary school

education. However, Paton (2013) who conducted a study in the United Kingdom to find out reasons why religious education is increasingly marginalised in schools mentioned that most students lose interest in the subject. Paton found out that students are dropping out RE, because the subject is being ‘edged out’ of the timetables by General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) reforms which means the subject is always at the end during national examinations. This reason has made many students lose interest in the subject, not necessarily because it has too much content.

The point is that the subject is not interesting because it has much information. The study has shown that students do not like reading too much. It has also been noted that the reading culture is lowering amongst most students. BK involves reading and if one has poor reading culture will definitely lose interest in the subject.

This reason was also noted in both JCE and MSCE BK Chief Examiners Reports of 2008 and 2013 respectively which indicated that because of the lack of reading culture, candidates do not remember what they learnt, hence giving wrong examples. The length of both junior and senior BK syllabus makes it impossible for students to master all the stories. This too makes the subject not interesting to most students. Most questions taken from the end of the syllabus are poorly done by most candidates, an indication that most teachers do not cover up to the end of the syllabus because it is wide. This is why the number of candidates sitting for BK at senior secondary school level is being reduced every year (BK Chief Examiners Report, JCE, 2008 & MSCE, 2013).



The foregoing discussion reflects the difficult nature of BK because of the way the syllabus was designed to have many Bible books which student find difficult to study. Since the syllabus is a national curriculum document it can be argued that the macrosystem of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) contributes to students dropping of the subject. In this case the macrosystem represents the ministry of education which came up with the syllabus which is so wide. This has the negative effect of students losing interest in the subject at senior secondary school level.

#### **4.1.4 Lack of perceived value of BK for students' prospective careers**

The other reason that came out clearly in this study was that the subject is perceived to have no relevance to future of the students in terms of job prospects. Most participants observed that this is the major reason for students' dropping of BK at senior after taking it at junior secondary school level. The perception is that students choose subjects that have economic benefits in their future life. For example, some BK teacher participants from different schools had this to say:

*Students drop BK because they see that most of the careers are on sciences not BK. Even if you guide them they say; what will I become if I take BK. Their perception is that BK does not have future. They also see that colleges are demanding sciences. Therefore they see no need of taking BK which has no job opportunities. On the other hand, there are some teachers especially science teachers who discourage these students that BK is of no use, it cannot take them anywhere. That is why they do not continue with it (Interview, BKT 9, School E).*

Another BK teacher participant commented that:

*Our University selection system has contributed to this because most students know that if they have to make it to the university and find a job in future, they have to target the science subjects. Most of the students will opt*

*to go for sciences rather than BK which is usually viewed as second preference as far as university selection is concerned. I can say BK is a subject which has no value to their future life (Interview, BKT1, School A)*

During face to face interview with BK teacher participants, most of them agreed that Bible Knowledge does not provide job opportunities. Supporting the same reason that there is lack of perceived value of BK for students' perspective career, another BK teacher participant highlighted that:

*The ministry of education is encouraging students to take science subjects as important subjects rather than humanities. BK is one of the subjects that are facing that problem. Some teachers too feel BK is not important that is why they encourage students to drop and study hard in sciences. Most of them are saying BK is not career related subject, so they want subjects which are connected to most of the career we have in the field. If at all the curriculum can change to target it with career choices, the students may wish to take it (Interview, BKT4, School B).*

When asked why most students drop Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level, one student participant from FGD 4 responded that “the aim of learning different subjects in school is that they help you to procure a good job at the end of the day. Therefore, if a subject is not promising in terms of job opportunities, it is good that you stop learning it.”

*[Timaphunzira kuti ku tsogolo tidzapeze ntchito koma ngati phunziro limenelo silothandiza kuti udzapeze ntchito ndibwino kulisiya]*

According to the ideas provided by the participants above, somebody cannot be into school studying subjects that have no value in life. Most learners dropped BK because they thought it was not important and it does not have any value in their future life in terms of job opportunities. This is what another head-teacher participant observed:

*The reason is the current situation, more especially in terms of the employment system which is most commonly in these days. Most professionals opt for science subjects more than humanities. As result you would find that in an advert they would say we want science and some other subjects. At MSCE the minimum number of subjects is six, if a student takes Biology, Agriculture, then may be physical Science because it is one of the requirements already you have three and then you take English because it is a must and then you take Chichewa you have five subject. Now the sixth one most people would choose what they feel it is not difficult or that is also important. For example, there are subjects like Social Studies and.... It is like the government has contributed to the drop because it is encouraging science subjects and the industry which is looking for science people. People go for areas where employment is wide and they go for such subjects. Other organizations like churches, for one to be a pastor, very few people are employed. For someone who wants to go for may be accounting, BK is not necessary. Such situations are some of the reasons students drop BK at MSCE level (Interview, HT 3, School C).*

Referring to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this factor of lack of perceived value of BK for students' prospective careers is caused by both the environment in which the students live and the society as a whole for not creating job opportunities in line with this subject. In support of what has been said; the other three student participants elaborated that:

*BK is not my career and I do not know why we learn it. I have never heard career talks that deal with BK. It would have been much better if career talks concerning the benefits of BK were conducted right from form one. In most cases teachers do talk careers pertaining to science subjects like Agriculture, Physical Science and Biology. This is why many students opt for Science subjects other than BK. [Ine ndinawona kuti BK si zomwe ndimafuna kudzachita mtsogolo. Kwaine vuto ndiloti, tikamaphunzira zimene zija ntchito yake ndi chiyani? Komanso sikukhala kukambaza ntchito yomwe munthu angagwire akaphunzira BK. Pamafunika kuti tikamayamba kuphunzira ku Form I, azitiwuzana anafe kuti BK imathandiza mnjira yakuti yakuti. Aphunzitsi amangolimbikira kukamba za maphunziro ena ngati Physical Science, Agriculture ndi Biology. Ndiye timaona ngati kunjaku ntchito ndi ya udokotala basi. Ndichifukwa chake ana ambiri amangolimbikira ma science, BK ndikuyisiya. Ndiye poti aphunzitsi amangolimbikira ma science, ife timangoti ndiye kuti upite ku college ndi*

*kuzakhala pa ntchito mtsogolomu, uyenera ulimbikire ma sciences osati ma humanities ngati BK] (FGD 5, School E).*

Another student participant had this to say:

I dropped BK because the government encourages us to study science subjects. Worse still I do not know the benefits of BK which is not compulsory at school. I have never heard the government saying that BK should be compulsory I have never heard career talks in relation to BK subject hence opted to drop it. *[Ine ndinayisiya BK chifukwa a boma amalimbikitsa ma science. Sindinamvepo kuti a boma akunena kuti BK ikhale yokakamiza ndipo ntchito zake ndi zakuti. Amangotchula za ma science. Pachifukwa chimenecho, ndinangoyisiya. Koma nkhani yayikulu ndi yoti satiuza ubwino wa BK kuti anthu tizidziwa kuti ndiyotheandiza] (FGD 1, School A).*

Further, one student participant said:

The problem is that you do not know the future of BK whether it can take you to college or not and which university enrolls those with BK. Therefore you think of the subjects which you know will take you to college, for example Agriculture, there is Bunda College. *[Ukamaphunzira BK umati kodi college imene ndingapite ndi iti? Ndiye umangopanga zoti izi sizindithandiza komwe ndikupitako kulibeko. Ma university komwe ungapite kwa BK sitikukudziwako ayi chifukwa aphunzitsi samatiunikira. Ndiye munthu umati ukapanga BK palibe kuti udzakhala dokotala kapena mwakuti. Ukatenga Agriculture umatha kudziwa kuti uzdapita ku Bunda. Pamene ma college a BK umakhala usakuwadziwa, ndiye umangoyisiya] (FGD 3, School C).*

From the BK Chief Examiners reports for BK the same reason of lack of perceived value of BK for students' prospective careers was observed. The BK chief examiner noted that schools were not encouraging students to study BK. There is a general tendency of discouraging students from taking BK with an impression that it has no career prospects. The BK Chief Examiner expressed concern that this subject should be encouraged as it helps in the process of transforming the whole human being. It was pointed out in the

report that some schools do not give enough time for the subject on the timetable (BK Chief Examiners Report, JCE, 2008 & MSCE, 2013).

Dove (2013) explains that reduction in the number of students enrolling in RE is because students are responding to messages from governments about where their future employments are to be. For example, the governments and colleges encourage courses in science and technology, engineering and mathematics as they are responding to economic imperatives, both locally and nationally. This is not far from what is happening in Malawi where science subjects are now made compulsory to all students at secondary school level. This is a deliberate move to ensure that the education sector nurtures science and technology, to have a technologically driven nation. This was confided by one official from Ministry of Education Science and Technology (Ngwira, 2014).

As observed from this study, the subject was being dropped at senior secondary school level because it had no career prospects. Most students and teachers did not see the value of the subject. As a result it was just taught and learnt for the sake of just learning it but with no purpose in the lives of the learners. It seems nothing had been done to make students understand the importance of the subject in their lives. Therefore, teachers and students concentrated more on the core subjects as they were directed by government. The perception was that the core subjects are helping students to find better courses.

As regards the ecological systems theoretical perspective, this reason is emerging from both the microsystem and the macrosystem levels. The microsystem is the system closest

to the person and the one in whom they have direct contact. Some examples would be home, school and neighbourhood. This is where the most direct interaction takes place, that is, interaction with teachers, parents and peer group. In this study, there were teachers who had an influence on the choice of the subjects by the learners through discouraging them to study humanity subjects such as BK. Instead they encouraged them to study science subjects forgetting that learners have got different abilities as such they cannot all do well in sciences. The society as a whole and the ministry of education stands for the macrosystem level. They had the influence on the choice of the subjects by the learners by not including BK amongst the core subjects and by not introducing more career prospects in relation to BK. The ministry of education was emphasizing much on science subjects rather than humanities. This resulted in the students' dropping of BK in large numbers at senior secondary school level because even the university selection, one of the requirements is that one should pass one of the science subjects for them to be admitted.

Therefore, the students' dropping of the subject is responsive of what the society is demanding. Views of the participants in this study indicate that the university selection system had contributed a lot to the students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level.

#### 4.1.5. Perceiving BK as a subject for promoting faith and not academic knowledge among learners

In this study, it has been noted that to a larger extent BK is perceived as the subject for promoting faith and not academic knowledge among learners. The way the BK content is being presented is more of confessional than academic. Most participants said that BK is more of spiritual help. For example, one student participant declared that:

I dropped BK because it was confusing with my religious belief. When using the Bible at school, you just read it as we read notes. When you go to church you also read the Bible as you do at school. This does not show the greatness of the Bible in the church hence not benefiting from the fruit of reading the Holy Bible. Therefore, I decided to drop BK at school so as to read the Bible at Church with seriousness. *[Ineyo chifukwa chimene ndinayisiyira BK ndi chakuti anthu ena amanena kuti baibulo ukamaligwiritsa ntchito mwa sukulu, umangowerenga moloweza, ndiye zimakhala zoti za mawu a mulungu aja sukhala nazo chidwi. Ndiye ku Tchalitchi kuja kungoligwira baibulo, m'malo moti uziwerenga ndi chidwi kuti zizikukhuza mumtima, kuti uzikhala mwa ambuye, mwa uzimu, zimapezeka kuti umangoti izi ndizimene timawerenga ku sukulu. Ndiye m'malo moti sizikukhudza m'moyo wako, umangoti ndi notsi izi. Chimenecho ndi chimene ndinasiyira kuti mwina mwake ndikamawerenga baibulo ndizitha kulimvetsetsa mwa uzimu]* (FGD 3, School C).

In one of the focus group discussions, most participants observed that Bible Knowledge is the subject for those who want to become pastors. Another student participant stated that:

I do not dream of becoming a pastor. BK is a subject for pastors to be, it prepares them spiritually thereby become a good pastors. Those wishing to grow spiritually to become pastors are the ones to study BK; I am not one of them, that is why I dropped BK. *[Ine sindinafuni kuti ndizakhale m'busa ndichifukwa chake ndinayisiya BK. BK ndiyothandiza kuti mu umoyo wako munthu uzikhala wosinthika. Ndiyothandiza kwambiri ku umoyo wa uzimu. Pamakhala ena amene amafuna atazakhala a busa. Ndiye woterewo akakhala kuti BK anayiphunzira sizingawavute chifukwa moyo wawo unasinthika kale ali pa sukulu. Ndiye ndimaona kuti BK ndiyofunikira pa moyo wa munthu pa zauzimu osati pa tsogolo la munthu]* (FGD 1, School A).

Referring to Bronfenbrenner's systems theory, this factor of perceiving BK as a subject for promoting faith and not academic knowledge among learners emanate from the macrosystem level which represents the large society in the way it perceives the subject of Bible Knowledge. In support of what had been said, one BK teacher participant noted that:

*Students also take BK as a spiritual subject. They say it is the subject for pastors. I think these students undermine the subject. They think it is not important, they say it does not have any value in their future life apart from preparing those who wants to become pastors. That perception is high in their mind that is why they drop the subject. And they say that they learn all issues about the bible in their respective churches rather than doing it at school or in class. Even when you are teaching BK, they call you pastor (Interview, BKT 7, School D).*

This reason of perceiving BK as a subject for promoting faith and not academic knowledge among learners was also articulated by one head-teacher participant who said that:

*Most students drop BK because they feel each church has a duty to teach its members about faith not at school as it is the case here in Malawi. I think these students lack guidance from the government, parents and teachers to enlighten them that BK is not aiming at developing faith to a particular belief, for example, Christianity. It is a subject that can help them in their lives like any other subject. Anyway, we lose many students in BK because of this perception that BK is for spiritual growth (Interview, HT 2, School B).*

These views reflect understanding the teaching and learning of BK as a religious and not an educational activity. As Hull (1984) puts it, RE can be conceptualised as confessional or non-confessional. It is confessional where the aim is to convert learners or lead them to a confession of one given faith or religion or help them to grow in that faith or religion. On the other hand, it is non-confessional where the aim is to give learners a liberal



understanding of religions without privileging one religion or faith over other faiths or religions (Salanjira, 2009; Steyn, 2004).

Furthermore, in some literature reviewed the same perspective that Bible Knowledge is promoting faith and not academic knowledge was also observed. For example; some scholars like Hughes, Butler, Kritsonis, Kritsonis and Herrington (2007, p. 33) observe that many young people think that RE was appropriate for prospective clergy, but for no one else. This view of the purpose of education was then applied negatively to religious education. They explained that in London, for example, students asked this question, “Why should I have to do RE? I do not want to be a nun; I do not like the uniform”.

Hull (2007) adds that most of the time students will have this kind of thinking when RE is taught as a single religion. This is known as learning religion and learning about religion or confessional approach. In these two kinds of RE, religion is taught for its own sake, whether as an object of faith to which the children are summoned or as an object worthy of critical study. Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994) observe that the teaching of RE as an educational activity has the potential of helping learners to develop social and life skills such as the clarification of values, civil toleration of differences, and cultural literacy.

Collis and Hussey (2003) agree that like other academic subjects in the curriculum, religious education must concentrate on developing basic skills in observation, listening, reading, writing and thinking. As such, the public school has a special role to play in

relation to religion which is different from that performed by the church and mosque. Carr (2008, p. 670) proposed that RE should be linked or integrated “with other school subjects in arts, humanities and sciences.” He is criticizing the teaching of RE as a separate subject in the school curriculum without showing any meaningful links with other schools subjects. This is important in promoting more educationally religious literacy. It can also have the potential to promote a holistic view of religion as an important dimension of human and social life. To that effect, Carr (2008, pp. 670-671) argues that offering RE as a separate subject “ is inappropriate for the general run of pupils-precisely in so far as this serves to undermine or obscure understanding of the relevance of religious study to other studies and vice versa”. The MSCE BK Chief Examiner observed that most students take BK subject as spiritual subject. Since over fifty percent gave what they heard from their spiritual preachers which is not BK (BK Chief Examiners’ Report, MSCE, 2014).

According to Bronfenbrenner’s theory, this reason was coming from the macrosystem level. Thus, the influence for students’ dropping of the subject was coming from a larger society in which there was the ministry of education. The society was not valuing BK as an important subject. It had failed to create job opportunities in relation to BK. That is why students linked it with spiritual growth of an individual. Had it been that the society or schools were coming out to tell learners the importance of BK on a serious note, there was an indication that most students would have not dropped the subject at senior secondary school level. This translates into the fact that the society and teachers are not familiar or do not even know the aims of offering BK in public schools in Malawi.

As noted from this study that BK is perceived as promoting faith and not academic knowledge among learners; gives the picture that the Ministry of Education is not doing enough to take its responsibility of providing the students with complete education than offering religious indoctrination. Conceptualising BK as a means of faith-promotion among learners has led to the dropping of the subject by many student according to findings of this study. The students dropped the subject because they did not have a source of motivation. There was no one telling them the importance of BK. They listened to their friends who gave them bad advice. The materials that were given to them lacked substance. As a result, their interest was submerged and belittled and they were made to think that all they do is in vain hence dropping the subject.

The point being raised is that, while it is true that the constitution of Malawi provides freedom of worship, such a provision is meant to protect one's right to freedom of conscience, not to limit one's academic freedom. BK as an educational activity is meant to contribute to the national goals of education, by helping learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion in the world and society in which they live. Promoting faith among learners is not one of the national goals of education in Malawi. That is the duty of faith-communities or families.

#### **4.1.6. Non-Christian learners are not comfortable with BK because of its mono-faith nature**

The reason that BK is only focusing on Christianity, was pointed out by most participants as one of the reasons why students take BK at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level in Malawi. Most participants stated that BK only favours Christians while

sidelining those who belong to other religions. For example, one participant affirmed that:

*You know we are coming from different religious backgrounds. You cannot force somebody to take BK knowing that he or she belongs to another religion because it will be like talking against their own religious background. We have some cases whereby Muslims take BK while others shun from taking it. BK mostly is based on Christianity and Muslims will find it is against their religion. Muslims have a perception that this teacher is preaching to them instead of just teaching. Hence, they are not comfortable taking it as a result they drop the subject at senior level. I understand that my role is just to encourage them by talking to them all the goodness of this subject. I remember in my class I had three students in Form 3 dropping BK because they were Muslims. They did not want to hear about Jesus (Interview, BKT 7, School D).*

Commenting on the issue of the different religious backgrounds of students and the importance of teaching BK not with the aim of promoting faith but academic knowledge, one BK teacher had this to say:

*What we need to know and remember is that in public schools it is not only Christians that are there and many times Muslims hate BK. Of course my role is to entice everyone not to have the perception that BK is only for Christians. However, BK portrays that it is for the Christians. That is a reason enough for other students to drop the subject. But my role as teacher is to entice everyone to be able to take BK and tell them that this is not a Christian subject but it is for everyone (Interview, BKT 8, School D).*

In support of what had been said by the above two participants that non-Christians are not comfortable with the teaching and learning of BK; most participants from FGDs had similar observation. For instance, one of participants from one FGD stated that:

*As Muslims, we do not believe in Jesus, yet this subject has more information about Jesus. This is Christian based subject. Some teachers do not respect other religious groupings when teaching. This resulted into non-Christians not to like the subject, hence dropping it. [Ife Asilamu, sitimakhulupilira za Yesu khristu, pamene BK imakamba za Yesu, ndiye ifeyo sizikutisangalatsa ndibwino tingoyisiyiya. Phunziro limeneli limangoganizira a khristu wokha. Komanso aphunzitsi ena akamaphunzitsa*

*amakhala ngati kuti akukulalikirani. Ndiye akamatero amakhala akunyoza zipembedzo zina, ndiye zimenezo zimata kukhumudwitsa mwana wa sukulu kwambiri amene sali m'khristu. Ndifukwa chake enafe tinayisiya]* (FGD5, School E).

In almost all focus group discussions, the participants agreed that non- Christians are not comfortable with the learning of Bible Knowledge. The subject is more of Christianity and is not considering other religions. It can be argued that this is the disadvantage of a mono-faith approach to the teaching and learning of religion in a religiously diverse society. Another student participant affirmed that:

At JCE level, there were a lot of things that I disliked, for example being unable to understand what the teacher was teaching. The subject is more of Christian based and no Islamic studies in the subject. Moreover my parents advised me not to study BK at MSCE level, this contributed to my decision to drop BK. *[Panali zina zimene sindinkagwirizana nazo m'mene tinkaphunzira ku JCE. Mwachitsanzo mabukhu ena akamaphunzitsa sindinkamva. Komanso ndinawona kuti BK imakomera munthu amene ali mkhristu, kuti zimene zikukambidwa m'mene muja zikumusangalatsa. Koma kwa munthu amene ali msilamu ngati ine sizimamusangalatsa. Bwanji amene amapanga ma bukhu samapanga Islamic studies kuti kwa amene ali a Silamu nawonso azisangalala. Komanso ineyo makolo anga anadilangizanso pa Form 3 kuti ndiyisiye chifukwa BK ilibe ntchito]* (FGD 4, School D).

Supporting the same reason, another student participant had this to say:

BK is for Christians. As Christians we are able to relate what was learnt at school and what is being preached in the church. While others like Muslims, do not have that opportunity because what is being taught is contrary to their religion. It would have been much better if the subject consisted of a mixture of different religious teachings. Though I am a Christian, I dropped it because did not want to study a biased subject. *[BK imakondera a khristu kwambiri. Ifeyo a khristu tikapita ku tchalitchi timakhala tikumaphunziranso ndipo timakhala tikudziwa kuti nkhani iyi imanena zakuti zakuti. Pamene msilamu amaphunzira za kumzikiti. Bwezi akumalisakaniza, kumatengako uku pang'ono ukunso pang'ono. Ine ndine mkhristu koma dinayisiya chifukwa anzanga achisilamu ankayidandaula, ndiye sindinafuni kutenga phunziro lokondera]* (FGD 2, School B).

According to the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the students made a decision to drop bible knowledge because of their families, peers and religious influences. They thought the subject is more of promoting faith than academic knowledge. It can therefore be argued that from the perspective of ecological systems theory, this reason emanated from the mesosystem level which says that sometimes the relationship of family experiences and the school experiences, school experiences to church experiences and family experiences to the experiences of a peer group, influence the decision of a child. Thus, it was seen that the family, school and religious experiences have contributed to the students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level after taking it at junior secondary school level. The religious experiences had made some students drop the subject. BK is about Christianity of which Muslim parents are not happy with and they told their children not to study BK. On the same, some teachers were preaching to the students instead of teaching, and to non- Christians that was confessional approach with an aim of converting students to Christianity. All these experiences had worked together in reducing the number of students who studied BK at senior secondary school level.

The reason was also observed by some scholars, for instance Chakanza (2000), in his writing concerning Islamic week in Malawi, observes that Muslim parents who do not want to expose their children to the likelihood of converting to Christianity opt to keep their children away from those schools controlled by Christians. Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994), Hull (2007), Summers and Waddington (1996) concur with Chakanza by saying that although increasing numbers of Muslim students are attending

government schools, many Muslim parents remain suspicious of the role of Christian instruction in the curriculum. Chidester, Mitchell, Omar and Phiri (1994, p.42) adds that “where one religion is taught at the exclusion of other religions, RE is criticised for segregation against other religions, more especially in a democratic religiously diverse society.” Religion in schools should be taught for merely academic reasons just like any other subject included in the school curriculum. The public school should not be expected to do the work of the faith communities or families in promoting their respective religions or faith as it was mentioned by some participants that some teachers were preaching instead of teaching.

What was noted in this study was the way BK was taught in public schools in Malawi, its purpose was not well explained to both Christians and non-Christians. The general perception by both Christians and non-Christians was that BK only benefits those who were already Christians. Most participants pointed out that the subject favours Christians, as a result, non-Christians do not see the need to continue with it. The subject had been conceptualised as a religious activity with an aim of leading the learners to a confession of and commitment to the Christian faith. Participants showed their concern that BK as it is in Malawi, does not have aspects of educational activity, rather it has more of a religious activity. They pointed out that religion in schools should be taught for merely academic reasons just like any other subject included in the school curriculum. It is important that BK in public schools be offered as an educational activity, without seeking to promote faith or elevating one religion over other religions. Therefore, a definition of RE as Christian education for example, might be defended on the basis of its role in

legitimizing the social order, its liberating potential, or its alleged reflection of the religious preferences of the majority of the population.

#### **4.1.7. Lack of relevant teaching and learning materials for BK compared to other subjects**

One reason for students' dropping at senior secondary school level was lack of relevant teaching and learning materials for Bible Knowledge. For some students it was a good reason why they took BK at junior and dropped it at senior secondary school level. Almost all participants expressed similar sentiments. For instance, some teacher and head-teacher participants noted that:

*The main challenge is the shortage of bibles. In most cases there is one bible and you have to read to the students. This is a contributing factor for these students not to like BK. During the teaching and learning of the New Testament, we use Gideon bibles but the language is not the same as in Good News. Now you can imagine a student just listening to you all the time, they become bored. That is why they fail and don't want to go on with it. If they can have bibles or books, I think they can like the subject and cannot think of dropping it (Interview, BKT 7, School D).*

*I understand in most cases they use bibles and there are special types of bibles that they use. Therefore, in most schools we don't have enough supply of those bibles and they are expensive to buy. Some subjects have the information available, they have books. This has made many students to drop the subject (Interview, HT 2, School B).*

*In Most secondary schools even if teachers are well qualified, but the syllabi for BK are not there. Most teachers just use the bible like in a church. There are no BK books. This also goes further down to our suppliers because the recommended books are not there. Even the publishers, the sellers, they opt to produce a lot of books which will give them money at the end of the day. You will find a lot of books in shelves for the other subjects but for BK what you will find is the Revised Standard Version (RSV) or Good News bibles and not even enough. This is a contributing factor to the students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level (Interview, HT 4, School D).*



Similar sentiments were echoed by BKT 8 who said that *“the problem of lack of relevant teaching and learning materials for BK is influenced by the Ministry of Education. It is not doing enough to provide enough teaching and learning materials for the subject.”*

Any subject needs to be supported by proper documents for it to be understood or for one to make reference to (McLean, 2000; Leah & Moon, 2008; Rao, 2008). This means any subject needs to have a syllabus, text books and a teacher’s guide so that the right information is delivered to the learners at the right time, following what is prescribed in the syllabus and text books. Where there is no information for a particular subject, it appears the subject is not worth studying. This is the case with BK. According to the participants in this study, most learners drop BK because there are no books to support the teaching and learning of this subject. As a result, most students find it not worth studying BK; hence they decide to drop it especially at senior secondary school level. In agreement to what has been said, this is what some participants from different schools stated:

*In most secondary schools there are no teaching resources. Teachers struggle to find a syllabus. As a result the teacher struggles to write schemes of work. This in turn affects the students. And a teacher cannot also encourage the learners to continue with the subject in that situation. To be frank here, a big challenge is lack of teaching materials. Bibles are very few (BKT 10, School E).*

Emphasising on the same reason of inadequate teaching and learning materials, one BK teacher participant stated that:

*A class of sixty, only two bibles, not even a teacher’s guide. A teacher needs at least a syllabus or a teacher’s guide so that learners should learn what is supposed to be learnt. But this is not the case here. When they buy books,*

*they only buy two bibles but more books for science subjects. That alone put students off from taking the subject especially at senior level. Government is not sending books for other subjects to our divisions to be distributed in schools. Schools are failing to buy many books because they are expensive. Students cannot also manage to buy their own (Interview, BKT 6, School C).*

Another student participant agreed that:

I dropped BK because the teaching and learning resources are inadequate. For example there is only one BK book at the library. The whole school cannot rely on only one BK book and it is not in order to use only a book. I therefore urge Ministry of Education to source other BK books for the schools. *[Chimene ndinasiyira BK ndi kusowa kwa zipangizo zake. Kupita ku library kuti ukabwerekeko bukhu, amakuuza kuti bukhu ndilimodzi lokha. Ndiye zimene zimapangitsa kusiya phunzirolo. Pakufunika kuti a unduna wa zamaphunziro apeze ma bukhu oti ife tiziwerenga osati baibulo chifukwa ukamawerenga baibulo umatha kuwerenga zina zoti mu syllabus mulibe] (FGD1, School A).*

To affirm that this reason of inadequate teaching and learning material was serious, one student participant had this to say:

I did not have an intention to drop BK at any point but to work hard and pass with 1 point at MSCE. Unfortunately at senior secondary school level there were inadequate teaching and learning resources. This forced me to drop BK as I knew that reading the Bible only would not make my dream come true. *[Ineyo kuyambira ku junior ndimafunitsitsa, ndipo ndinkachiika mumtima kuti ndikazafika Form 4 ndizakhoza 1 point. Koma nditafika ku senior ndayisiya chifukwa chosowa zipangizo zophunzirira ndi zophunzitsira monga ngati mabuku. Ndiye ndinawona kuti ndizingowerenga bible sizikhala zabwino. Baibulo tiyeni tilipase ulemu, analipanga ndizifukwa. Ku sukulu tiziwerenga mabuku kuti baibulo tiziligwira pa za uzimu pokha. Koma poti mabukhu sapezeka, ndichifukwa ndinayisiya BK] (FGD 3, School C).*

Analysing the documents which were available, similar observations were noted by the BK Chief Examiner who said that the good scores at MSCE were very few. Scores were not impressive due to lack of teaching and learning materials. In most government schools there are no Good News bibles or if any, then it means one bible is being shared

by many students. To be exact, it could be one against twenty students. Students too, find it very hard to purchase bibles, as of today, a copy of Good News bible is sold at five thousand Malawi kwacha (MK5, 000). This is very high for students in the villages. It seems our nation has strong emphasis on science; therefore, it seems that the interest on humanities is low. As of now, there are many new science books in schools but not even one bible is bought for any school. Possibly this has helped to reduce the number of candidates sitting for BK at senior secondary school level every year because it becomes difficult for the students to get the information that is required, since there are no books to refer to. He therefore urged the ministry to make sure that at least BK syllabus is available in schools and bookshops. He also noted with a strong feeling that if the nation was to improve candidates' performance and attendance in BK, learners in various schools should be provided with copies of the bible and BK books (BK Chief Examiners' Report, MSCE, 2010, 2013, 2014).

In this study, it was noted that most schools in Malawi do not have enough teaching and learning materials for BK, such as text books. In such a situation it becomes difficult to teach and learn BK since most of its activities demand learners to study the materials. As a result, teachers are forced to teach using the traditional methods where a teacher is giving information and learners are passive listeners. Most participants pointed out that without teaching materials, teaching and learning becomes very difficult. Even if one is a good teacher, it is not possible to make a good teacher without resources.

In other schools, participants complained that they had never seen a BK syllabus because the copies of BK syllabus are not found. They are teaching using their past experience from secondary school days. Some participants expressed concern that BK syllabus had not been revised for a long time. In a situation where there are no teaching syllabi and text books, teaching and learning has been automatically affected. Even if a teacher is competent but teaching content which is not relevant to the requirement of the syllabus will result in students scoring well in that subject at the end of the day. With the poor performance, students cannot like the subject. According to most participants in this study, the shortage of teaching and learning materials had been a contributing reason to students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level in Malawi.

However, there was need for individual schools and teachers to make an effort at least to find a syllabus for the subject from other schools. They could not just be teaching from experience and using a bible without a guide. In addition, teachers could still look for this old syllabus rather than none while waiting for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to come up with the revised syllabus and text books for BK.

This problem is from the macrosystem which is the fourth level of the Ecological Systems theory which deals with influences emanating from the largest and most remote people and things that have an influence over a child's life. It is the culture in which individuals live. In this case the society or the ministry of education in Malawi had contributed to the decision of many students that they could not continue with BK at senior secondary school level by not providing these learners with necessary teaching and

learning materials. This was negative influence on the child from the macrosystem. Students could see that other subjects were being provided with all the materials for teaching and learning but not with BK. To most students, the conclusion was that BK is not important, hence not worth studying. That is why many of them drop it at senior secondary level.

#### **4.1.8 Shortage of professionally trained Bible Knowledge teachers**

One of the contributing reasons to the students taking BK at junior and dropping it at senior secondary school level, in this study, is that there is shortage of qualified BK teachers in the field and the few that are there are also reluctant to teach the subject for several reasons that were mentioned by most of the participants. For example one participant noted that:

I dropped BK in form 3 after new BK teacher was introduced to us. Most of these teachers were not qualified they even refused to take questions from us. They said we should ask our respective pastors the questions we had. Surprisingly, subjects like Biology have qualified teachers. I then finally made up my mind to drop BK. *[Ine ndinasiya BK pa Form 3 chifukwa ndinawona kuti akungotisinthira aphunzitsi. Ena ndiwoti amachita kunena kuti iwowo BK simbali yawo amangowapempha kuti aziphunzitsa. Ndiye amakana kuti tiziwafunsa mafunso, amanena kuti tizikafunsa kwa abusa akumatchalitchi kwathu. Ndiye mphunzitsi amene sanapange za BK amamutenga kuti aziphunzitsa BK, pamene Biology siiphunzitsidwa ndi mphunzitsi woti sanapange za Biology. Ndiye ndinawona kuti subject imeneyi ndingoyisiya] (FGD 4, School D).*

This reason was corroborated by other participants as follows:

The BK teacher was lazy he could not teach competently with vigour as Biology teacher did. We could see some differences between the two. As a result of his laziness he could not deliver the subject well. This forced me to drop the subject. *[Chifukwa chimene ine ndinayisiyira BK ndichoti, aphunzitsi amene ankaphunzitsa BK amaphunzitsa mwaulesi. Sankalimbikira pamene a Biology ndi maphunziro ena ankalimbikira.*

*Zimakhala ngati kuti anachita kukakamizidwa, osati kuti iwowo ankafuna kumaphunzitsa BK. Ndiye ineyo kuti ndiyitsiye BK ndi chifukwa choti mphunzitsi wakeyo sankaphunzitsa bwino] (FGD 1, School A).*

When I was in form 2 there was no BK teacher which resulted in my poor performance at junior level. At times the assigned teacher could not turn up for the lesson. This made me drop BK in form 3. *[Ine chimene ndinasiyira BK pa Form3 ndi chifukwa choti, tili Form 2 aphunzitsi a BK amasowa. Ndiye nthawi ya mayeso ndinkangolakwa chifukwa chosaphunzira bwino. Pa mayeso a MANEB sindinakhonzenso bwino. Zonsezi chifukwa chosowa Kwa aphunzitsi komanso kusafuna kuphunzitsa aphunzitsiwo ngakhale alipo] (FGD 5, School E).*

When asked what are the challenges that the students face in learning Bible Knowledge, BKT10 affirmed that *“the subject is taught by non- specialist in most of the time. It seems colleges have stopped training BK teachers”*

Any subject is well taught when there are specialist teachers or experts for that particular subject. When a teacher knows the content of the subject will always do the work with zeal with an aim of producing good results (Rao, 2008; Rudge, 1988). The opposite is true in that, when teachers are not sure of what they are teaching, the results of their work will be poor and the poor performance discourages learners to continue studying that particular subject. This is the case with BK. In most schools, there are no BK teachers and the subject has been handled by non-specialists. According to the participants in this study, this has discouraged many learners not to continue with BK, more especially at senior secondary school level. In support of this statement, one Head-teacher made the following observation:

*One of the reasons is that in most schools teachers who teach BK are few, so that in most schools, the ones who teach BK are not specialised in that. It is like they find it easier to teach at junior secondary school level. Teachers*

*are not willing to teach the subject at senior secondary school level because they find it difficult since they are not specialized. On the same, teachers are reluctant to teach because the government has denied promotions and in-service training for humanity teachers and BK teachers in particular for a long time. This affects the learners' performance. No wonder students are dropping the subject in large numbers (Interview, HT3, School C).*

In addition HT2 said “*Lack of professionally trained Bible Knowledge is an environmental problem. Our colleges produce very few BK teachers in a year compared to other humanities subjects...*”

Like all formal education, Bible Knowledge will ultimately succeed or fail in the classroom based on the quality of the interactions between teachers and students (Rao, 2008). Teachers will need access to the necessary support, including textbooks, supplementary materials, handbooks, guidelines for teaching methods and student assessment. In-service training will allow them to build and sustain their professional competence and recognition as teachers in the subject. Commenting on the same reason one BK teacher said:

*Most of us are not happy with the subject. We are reluctant to teach BK because we are not considered unlike our friends from other departments like science department; they have in-service trainings now and then. But our humanity department, there are no such things. We seem to be reluctant because we do not have incentives. Lack of interest for teachers has also made the students to drop the subject (Interview, BKT 9, School E).*

In addition, the MANEB BK Chief Examiners' report for both JCE and MSCE in their recommendations explained that teachers in secondary schools are not motivated by the education system. It was strongly said and observed that there are a lot of humanity teachers who have been denied promotions. In particular, BK teachers are not promoted on the same level as science teachers. Therefore teachers do not work as expected, they

are reluctant to teach the subject resulting into shortage of qualified BK teachers in schools. Many BK teachers in secondary schools in Malawi had studied Theology Courses only and there is need for these teachers to go for University Certificate of Education (UCE) Courses to improve their teaching skills. This has affected the students who take BK. As a result there is a reduction in the enrolment of students who take BK at senior secondary school level. The BK Chief Examiners for both senior and junior secondary national examinations urged the Ministry of Education Science and Technology and individual schools to revamp BK by training more BK teachers, conducting training workshops, seminars and in-service training for BK teachers. It emphasised that during such occasions, experts share ideas on how some topics are taught or how questions are supposed to be answered. In that way BK specialist teachers will be made available in schools (BK Chief Examiner's Report, JCE, 2008 & MSCE, 2006, 2013, 2014).

Similar observations were made by Matemba (2011) in his comparative study of religious education in Scotland and Malawi with special reference to developments in the secondary school sector. The shortage of specialist BK teacher has been there for a long time. Matemba noted that there was serious understaffing in BK. This problem was experienced both in Malawi and Scotland. That was why the teaching of BK was also affected. However, Matemba did not indicate that this understaffing and the use of non-specialist teachers contribute to the students' dropping of the subject at senior secondary school level in Malawi. This study therefore found this as one of the reasons for students' dropping of BK in Malawi at senior secondary school level.



Chizelu (2006), in his study, investigated why RE teachers tend to be reluctant to respond to the Ministry of Education directive to apply their subject using multi-religious educational approach in Zambia. The findings revealed that sometimes when teachers are unwilling to teach a particular subject, students are easily discouraged from studying that subject. Their perception is that the subject is not important. On the other hand if a teacher is not willing to teach a particular subject, he or she cannot encourage students to study that subject. Chizelu noted that the majority of the RE teachers in Zambia were Christians, therefore, they were reluctant to teach RE that also includes non-Christian religions. This reluctance by teachers led to the dropping of students from studying it. However, in this study, the reluctance by teachers to teach the subject was coming in because teachers were not motivated in one way or another.

Paton (2012) and Matemba (2011) discovered a similar problem in England and Malawi respectively where teachers were reluctant to teach RME because they were unsure of what they were trying to achieve in the subject hence steering students away from studying it. However, Matemba and Paton did not link teachers' reluctance to teach RME and students dropping of BK at senior secondary school level in Malawi. Therefore, this study has discovered that the reluctance of teachers to teach BK was one of the reasons why students drop the subject at senior after taking it at junior secondary school level.

As noted in this study, in most secondary schools there were unqualified teachers. However, this was different from one school to another. In most schools, BK teachers were there but they were the ones who studied Theology and did not have skills in

teaching BK, hence considered unqualified. In other schools, there were qualified teachers in other subjects not in BK. They were just told to teach BK because at that particular school there were no qualified BK teachers. In almost all schools visited in this study, BK teachers were not provided with in-service training, workshops and even further studies to improve in their teaching as it was the case with their fellow teachers of other subjects. Therefore, because of the situation around them, most BK teachers were reluctant to teach the subject such that students were able to notice that attitude and most of them decided to drop the subject.

The importance of good teachers is no secret. Schools and their communities always need to seek out the best teachers they could get in the belief that their students' success depends on it. What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn. Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools. School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions under which teachers can teach and teach well. Teachers' knowledge of the content they teach is a consistently strong predictor of students' performance. The presence of teachers with at least a major in their subject area is the most reliable predictor of student achievement scores (Greenberger, 2002).

It can be argued that this reason emanated from the microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels of the ecological systems theory. The microsystem is where a child had direct contact with teachers who in this study were considered unqualified. The way some of these teachers were presenting BK content especially at junior secondary school

level did not please most students. As a result, most students drop the subject at senior secondary school level. Almost all participants agreed that there was shortage of well qualified BK teachers in the field. That is why the problem also falls in the exosystem level which refers to a setting that does not involve the person as an active participant, but still affects them. This includes decisions that have bearing on the person, but in which they have no participation in the decision-making process. In this case, because BK teachers were not being promoted, it affected some of the learners to the point that they decided to drop the subject. The reason extended into macrosystem level which represented the Society or MoEST which had failed to bring into the system many qualified BK teachers who would improve the teaching of BK. Participants asserted that there was need for the Ministry of Education to train more BK teachers and for those who were already in the field, there was need to provide them with in-service training, workshops and further studies in order to improve their skills of teaching BK.

#### **4.1.9 Parental influence and advice not to study Bible Knowledge**

In this study it was also revealed that one of the reasons for students' taking BK at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level is that they are influenced by parents or guardians. For example, one participant had this to say:

*Sometimes when you chat with some students they would tell you that; they dropped the subject because their parents advised them to drop. They say their parents themselves went to school and had problems with BK. So they advise their children to drop BK because it is difficult to understand (Interview, HT 4, School D).*

Another participant observed that:

*Sometimes they are advised by their parents to drop. They tell their children the courses they want them to do and the subjects suiting those courses. Unfortunately BK is not amongst those subjects. This is another reason why students drop BK especially at senior secondary school level. Parents are encouraging their children to drop (Interview, BKT 8, School D).*

In support of the above view another participant said:

I would have loved to study BK, but after consulting my parents, they advised me to study French instead of BK. They said that BK is of less importance in Malawi. As a result I dropped BK. *[Ine chifukwa chimene ndinasiyira BK ndichakuti ndinakafunsa kaye makolo anga kuti nditenge chiyani pakati pa BK and French. Ndiye iwowo anandiuza kuti nditenge French chifukwa BK m'Malawi muno siphunziro lofunikira kweni kweni. Koma BK pandekha ndimayikonda ndipo ndimayifuna koma ndinapanga zowasangalatsa makolo anga]* (FGD 3, School C).

Similarly, HT1 said “*It becomes very difficult for teachers to convince students to take BK if their parents have already told them not study it. In most cases parents have their own expectations from their children that is why they help them which the subjects to study.*”

In this study, it was noted that parents had an influence in the decision making of their children on which subjects they could take. Most participants agreed that parents wanted their children to be on higher positions after school of which they believed that those higher positions can only be attained by taking other subject rather than BK. They encouraged their children to drop BK and go for science subjects. This was very important for parents to encourage their children so that there could be good relationship between teachers, parents and students themselves. However, parents forget that a

decision to choose the subjects depends on the ability of an individual student. When a student is given chance to choose the subjects they want to study, they will like the subjects because it is their own choice and prospects for them doing better are very high. This reason is emanating from the microsystem level of Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979). Being the closest system to the person, it has the influence on the decision of a person. For example, in this study parents who are close to the child at home are seen to have influence on the choice of the subjects for their children. However, the individual is not the passive recipient of experiences in these settings but someone who actually helps to construct the social settings (McLaren, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993). This means, for the parents to come up with that influence, the individual student had already shown resistance to continue with the BK at senior secondary school level.

#### **4.2 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed the reasons for students' dropping of BK at senior after taking it at junior secondary school level. The reasons have been presented thematically and interpreted within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. These include : BK is an optional subject at senior secondary school, perceived difficulty of the BK examination, BK is not an interesting subject, lack of perceived value of the subject for students prospective careers, perceiving BK as a subject for promoting faith not academic knowledge among learners, non- Christian learners are not comfortable with subject because of its mono-faith nature, lack of relevant teaching and learning materials compared to other subjects, lack of professionally trained BK teachers and parental influence and advice not to study BK.

The main argument of the chapter is that the reasons why most students take BK at junior secondary school level and drop it at senior secondary school level are influenced by many factors emanating from different levels of the society. There was a general consensus by participants that there is really a drastic drop of students who take BK at senior secondary school level. Some of the reasons are similar to what other scholars found in their studies in other countries when they were looking at different issues surrounding RE. However, other reasons are exceptional to Malawi. All in all it is true that the environment in which one lives influences his or her thinking and decisions. People will always respond to what the environment or the society is demanding at that particular time. In the next chapter, the researcher presents the conclusions drawn from the study and make recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Chapter overview**

This study aimed at exploring why some students study Bible Knowledge (BK) at junior and drop it at senior secondary school level in Malawi. Five schools were selected in South Western Education Division (SWED). Two schools were conventional while three were community day secondary schools. This chapter provides conclusions, and recommendations of the study as well as areas for further research.

#### **5.1 Conclusions**

The main research question guiding the study was: Why do some students who study Bible Knowledge at junior secondary school level drop it at Malawi senior secondary school level? This was expanded by the following research sub-questions; (a) What are the factors for the students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level? (b) How do students perceive the relevance of Bible Knowledge as a school subject? (c) What challenges do students face in learning Bible Knowledge in a multi-religious context? (d) How can the challenges students face in learning Bible Knowledge be overcome?

One conclusion is that the findings of the study have shown that most students dropped BK at senior secondary school level after studying and passing it at junior secondary school level because of several factors emanating from different levels of the society. One of the outstanding factors was that the subject is optional at senior secondary school level. The students are given a chance to choose subjects at senior secondary level whereas at junior secondary school, the subject is compulsory for learners in one class. For example all students allocated to one form such as forms 1 A, B or C in most schools, are forced to take the subject. In such cases, whether the learners like it or not, they take the subject. This is an option imposed by the school on the students. Hence there is high enrolment for Bible Knowledge at junior secondary school level. However, despite the subject being compulsory at junior secondary school level, most students pass the subject with good grades.

Another conclusion is that the study has shown that most of the students perceived Bible Knowledge examination as a difficult subject. Thus, one of the factors for students' dropping of the subject is that its examinations are difficult. Most students developed this perception due to peer pressure. Other students felt that the subject was difficult during the teaching and learning of the subject while others felt that the Malawi national examinations in Bible Knowledge were difficult. Because of this perceived difficulty of the subject, many students drop it in fear of poor performance at senior level while others are just told by fellow students that the subject is difficult. As a result some students decide not to continue with it. Students who dropped BK at senior secondary school level were not only those who performed poorly at junior secondary school level; but also



some of the students who passed the subject with good grades dropped it in form 3. This is a true indication that most of the students drop BK due to peer pressure.

Another factor for students' dropping of the subject is that some students did not find the subject interesting. This is because Bible Knowledge involves writing a lot of notes and reading too much. However, other students felt that the subject was not interesting because it did not have text books. Students depended on the bible, and studying from the bible alone make students lose interest. The result was poor performance in the national examinations leading to students dropping the subject at senior secondary school level.

On the question of the relevance of Bible Knowledge, it can be concluded that there was perceived lack of value of the subject for student's prospective careers. Some students pointed out that Bible Knowledge is not an important subject as far as job opportunities are concerned. The country has no jobs for those who study the subject. As a result, some students were not encouraged to study it. Other students opted for career prospects. Furthermore, some parents encouraged their children not to continue with Bible Knowledge since it did not have any value in terms of job opportunities. This is true, because the messages that the government is disseminating at this time is that students must study science subjects. Humanities subjects are elective. Even university selection processes are demanding science subjects. Some students indicated that they choose to study those subjects that had direct job opportunities and Bible Knowledge was not regarded as such: that is why they dropped it at senior secondary school level.

Bible Knowledge was only perceived as important for spiritual growth and for those who have a desire of becoming pastors in future. It was perceived as the subject that was there for the promotion of faith and not academic knowledge among learners. This tended to put off most non-Christian learners.

On the question of challenges faced by learners in studying the subject, it can be concluded that students face a number of them in a multi-religious context. Firstly, in many schools, teachers and learners depended solely on the Bible as a main resource during teaching and learning of BK. The Bible is about one religion, Christianity excluding other religions. In addition, the subject lacked relevant teaching and learning materials such as text books. This led to students' poor performance and students' dropping of the subject at senior secondary school level. Teachers were teaching out of context due to lack of syllabuses for Bible Knowledge. However, it should be noted that BK is not the only subject that is having problems of teaching and learning materials. BK teachers are supposed to be resourceful in finding the resources.

Another challenge is that students are taught by untrained Bible Knowledge teachers. When students realise that they are being taught by non-specialists BK teachers, they lose interest and some of them drop the subject because it is not taken seriously even by teachers themselves. Thus, it can be argued that, most students drop BK at senior secondary school level because they perceive less value of the subject in relation to career prospects. There are prospects that the number of students dropping the subject will increase if good measures are not taken to revamp the subject.

It has been noted that the reasons for students' dropping of BK at senior secondary school level, derive from different levels of the society. This is to affirm that the environment in which a person lives has a major influence on his or her behaviour and decisions. Therefore, in this study, the ecological systems theory has really helped to understand the reasons for students' not continuing with BK at senior secondary school level in Malawi.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

In view of the factors contributing to students' dropping of Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level, noted in this study, the following are recommendations to stop the trend of students' dropping of the subject at senior after taking it at junior secondary school level.

On teaching and learning resources, there is need for the government to provide these teaching and learning materials such as BK textbooks, bibles and other relevant teaching resources to schools. The ministry should make the BK syllabus and teachers guides available in schools and bookshops. The schools should take care of the materials provided by the government. In addition, parents should take an active role in the provision of these resources to their children. In view of this, BK teachers should engage themselves in writing books that can be used in teaching and learning of BK. In this way, schools and parents will find this subject relevant and be able to advise and encourage learners not to drop it.

With respect to teacher training, MoEST should to further train teachers in order to be well grounded in BK content. There is a need to critically analyse the training model for

BK teachers to ensure that all of them at least have the same information that is needed to be delivered to the learners. Only BK teachers should be teaching the subject. There is need for training workshops or seminars for BK teachers where they can share ideas on how they can improve their teaching methods to help the students. Teachers should also be trained in all teaching methods in order for them to acquire the skills that induce learner participation, so that he or she does not think of dropping BK. If teachers are not well trained, they cannot deliver quality education. The quality of teaching is a major influence on student learning and achievement.

MoEST should provide incentives, such as promotions to BK teachers. Schools should organise inserts for BK teachers at either cluster or school level. It is critical for teachers to have ongoing and regular opportunities to learn from each other. Ongoing professional development keeps teachers up-to-date on new ways of how children learn. Teachers are reluctant to teach the subject which at the long run has contributed to the students' dropping of the subject especially as they go higher at senior secondary school level. Teachers feel that the government is providing little motivation, not as expected. Teachers are unhappy with the way promotions are done consequently they feel being neglected. This has affected the performance of learners hence a high drop rate in BK. In view of this, government through MoEST needs to ensure that promotions, workshops and inserts, among some, are done consistently and fairly.

It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education should make sure that some of the skills that are learnt in BK should be incorporated in other subjects, for example

journalism and law. This can only come to pass or materialise with the help of career talks. One implication here is that, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, BK teachers should be enlightening learners of the goodness of studying BK and courses that need some BK skills. This subject should be encouraged as it helps in the process of transforming the whole human being. The subject should be treated like any other subject on the school time table and teachers should help learners understand the importance of the subject in relation to admission to Universities.

### **5.3 Areas for further research.**

The purpose of any useful research is to expose the reader to what existed, what exists and what should be. As a researcher, one is supposed to learn something or gather evidence for specific things to add to your store of knowledge (Taflinger, 2011). This study investigated why some students study and pass BK at junior secondary school level but drop it at senior secondary school level.

Having presented the findings of the investigations, one area for further research would be exploring coping mechanisms of non-specialist teachers in implementing the BK syllabus in secondary schools. Another area might be on investigating the impact of untrained BK teachers on students' performance. Further exploring the challenges faced by teachers of BK would offer another area and finally investigating the perception of non-qualified teachers towards the teaching of Bible Knowledge and their impact on learners' performance.

#### **5.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented conclusions, recommendations and areas for further study based on the research findings on why students drop BK at senior after taking it at junior secondary school level. Its main argument is that students drop Bible Knowledge because of a variety of factors that emanate from different levels of the society. The factors make students lose interest in the subject or fail to see its relevance to their career prospects. The ecological systems theory can help to understand the multifaceted nature of factors that contribute to students' dropping of BK at senior level after studying and passing it at junior secondary school level.

## REFERENCES

- Ansari, S., & Martin, V. (2001). *Women, religion and culture in Iran*. London: Routledge.
- Ashton, E. (2003). *Religious education in the early years: Teaching and learning in the first three years of school*. London: Routledge.
- Babbie, E. (2001). *The practice of social research (11th ed.)*. New York: Wadsworth, Cengage Learn.
- Banda, K.N. (1982). *A brief history of education in Malawi*. Blantyre: Dzuka Publishing Company.
- Barrow, R., & Woods, R. (Eds.). (2006). *An introduction to philosophy of education (4th ed.)*. London: Routledge
- Bastide, D. (1987). *Religious education 5-12*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your research project: A guide for fifth time researchers in education and social sciences (2nd ed.)*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bell, J. (2005). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science (4th ed.)*. New York: Open University Press.
- Bless, C., & Higson-Smith, C. (1995). *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective (2nd ed.)*. Lusaka: Juta & Co.
- Borgdan, R. C., & Biklen, S.K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (2nd ed.)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S.J. (1993). *Heredity, environment, and the question "how?": A new theoretical perspective for the 1990s.* Washington, DC: APA Books
- Carmody, B. (2004). *Religion and education in Zambia*. Ndola: Mission Press.

- Carr, D. (2006). Moral education at the movies on the cinematic treatment of morally significant story and narrative, *British Journal of Moral Education*, 35(3), 319-333.
- Carr, D. (2008). Religious education, religious literacy and common schooling: A philosophy and history of skewed reflection. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, Society of Great Britain*, 41 (4), 659-673.
- Chakanza, J.C. (2000). *Islam week in Malawi 1998*. Sources for the study of religion in Malawi. No.18. Zomba, Malawi: Kachere.
- Chidester, D. (2012, December 7-9). Religious education in South Africa: Teaching and learning about religion. *Report from preparatory seminar held in Oslo*. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Chidester, D., Mitchell, G., Omar, A. R., & Phiri, I. A. (1994). *Religion in public education: Options for a new South Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Chizelu, J. M. (2006). *Teaching religious education in Zambia multi-religious secondary schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education (6th ed.)*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2003). *Business research: A practical guide for under graduate and post graduate students (2nd ed.)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Conklin, K.A. (1997). Course attrition: A 5- year perspective on why students drop classes, community college, *British Journal of Research and Practice*, 21 (8), 753-759.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. London: Sage Publications.
- Danner, F. (2009). *Bronfenbrenner Urie and child development*. Retrieved January 16, 2015 from: <http://explorable.com/users/sarah>



- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Dove, M. (2013). *Religious education has suffered in England*. Retrieved March 12, 2014, from: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education24399813](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education24399813)
- Evans, C. (2008). Religious education in public schools: An international human rights perspective. *Oxford Journal, Human Rights Law Review*, 8 (3), 449-473.
- Fisher, R. (2000). *Teaching children to think*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd.
- Fisher, R. (2006). *Teaching children to think (2nd ed.)*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes.
- Fraenkel, J.R., & Wallen, N.E. (2008). *How to design and evaluate research in education (7th ed.)*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Fraenkel, J.R., & Wallen, N.E. (2003). *How to design and evaluate research in education (5th ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hall Company Inc.
- Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed: Turning experienced education and critical pedagogy theory into praxis. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28 (2), 106-122.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed (3rd ed.)*. New York: Continuum International Publishing group Inc.
- Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P., & Borg, W.R. (2003). *Education research: An introduction (7th ed.)*. Boston: Person Education Inc.
- Garson, G.D. (2008). *Scale and standard measures*. Retrived January 9, 2015, from: <http://faculty.chass>
- Greenberger, M. (2002). *Nation's high schools still operates separate and unequal vocational education for male and female students*. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from: <http://search.eb.com/search?query=environment&x=10&=9>
- Grimmitt, M. (1994). Religious education and the ideology of pluralism, *British Journal of Education*. 16, (5) 133-147.
- Harder, A.F. (2014). *What motivates people to change?* New York: Columbia University.
- Hinckley, C. (2005). Exploring the use of television for guidance to expectant fathers. In K. Maree (Ed.). (2007). *First step in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

- Hirst, P.H. (1974). *Knowledge and the curriculum: A collection of Philosophical papers*. London: Routledge.
- Hirst, P.H. (1984). Philosophy of education in J.M. Sutcliffe (Ed.). *A dictionary of religious education*. London: SCM Press in association with the Christian Education Movement.
- Hirst, P.H., & Peters, R.S. (1970). *The Logic of Education*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Holm, J.L. (1975). *Teaching religion in school: A practical approach*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hornby, A.S. (1995). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, T.A., Butler, N.L., Kritsonis, M.A., Kritsonis, W.A., & Herrington, D. (2007). *Religious education in government-run primary and secondary schools in Poland and Canada*. Raleigh: International Focus.
- Hull, J.M. (1984). Nature of religious education. In J. M. Sutcliffe (Ed.), *A dictionary of religious education* (pp. 284-286). London: SCM Press in association with the Christian Education Movement.
- Hull, J.M. (2007). *The contribution of religious education to religious freedom: A global perspective*. Retrieved March 3, 2014, from: [www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Hull.html](http://www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Hull.html)
- Jarhall, J.O. (2001). *A look at changes in primary religious education in Malawi from Swedish perspective*. Linkoping: Linkoping University.
- King, P.C. (2004). *One hundred philosophers: A guide to the world's greatest thinkers*. Cape Town: Zebra press.
- Leah, J., & Moon, B. (2008). *The power of pedagogy*. London: Sage publications Inc.
- Magesa, L. (1997). *African religion: The moral life of abundant life*. New York: Orbis.
- MANEB (2006). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba: MANEB.
- MANEB (2008). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba: MANEB.
- MANEB (2009). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba: MANEB.

- MANEB (2010). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba: MANEB.
- MANEB (2011). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba: MANEB.
- MANEB (2013). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba: MANEB.
- MANEB (2014). *Bible Knowledge chief examiner's report*. Zomba : MANEB.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Matemba, Y.H. (2011). *A comparative study of religious education in Scotland and Malawi with special reference to developments in the secondary school sector 1970-2010*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow.
- McLaren, P. (2000). Paulo Freire's pedagogy of possibility. In Breunig, Turning experienced education and critical pedagogy theory into praxis. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28 (2), 106-122.
- Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2012). *Secondary school curriculum and assessment framework*. Domasi: MIE.
- Ministry of Education (1982). *Malawi school certificate of education bible knowledge syllabus*. Lilongwe: Inspectorate Department.
- MoEST (2012). *Secondary school curriculum and assessment framework*. Draft
- Molande, K.N.O. (2004). *The perceived impact of religious organizations on students' discipline in the municipality of Zomba*. Unpublished master's dissertation, University of Malawi, Zomba.
- Moore, A., & Perker, R. (2004). *Critical thinking (7th ed.)*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Morrison, N. (2014). *We neglect religious education at our peril*. Retrieved March 2, 2014, from: <http://www.forbes.com/nickmorrison/2014/02/26/weneglectreligiouseducation-at-ourperil/>
- Mudalitsa, J. (2000). *Towards A Philosophy of Religious Education*. Ndola: Mission Press.

- Nankwenya, I.A. J. (1977). *Christian influences on education in Malawi up to independence with special reference to the role of the catholic missionaries*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Ngwira, M. (2014). *Malawi to have all science subjects compulsory to the students in secondary level*. Retrieved March 14, 2014, from: [www.bnltimes.com](http://www.bnltimes.com)
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2007). Qualitative research design and data gathering procedures. In Maree, K. (Ed.). *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Vanschaik Publishers.
- Nord, W. A., & Haynes, C. (2014). *The relationship of religion to moral education in the public schools*. Retrieved March 3, 2014, from: [www.gwu.edu/~ccp/pomoral.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~ccp/pomoral.html)
- Nyawira, B. (2012). *Reasons why religious education is taught in Kenya schools today*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- O'Dala, T.R. (2001). *Junior secondary school religious and moral education and bible knowledge*. Lilongwe: MoEC.
- Oswalt, M.S.W. (2008). *Ecological systems theory*. Retrieved January 9, 2015, from: <http://explorable.com/users/sarah>
- Paton, G. (2013). *Religious education increasingly marginalized in schools*. Retrieved March 16, 2014, from: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Peters, R.S. (1966). *Ethics and education*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Peters, R.S. (1970). *The logic of education*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Phiri, I. (1988). Report of the fifth consultation on religious education held at the Dimesee Sisters conference centre, Karen, Kenya from 10-16 May. *Religion in Malawi*, 1 (2), 33-34.
- Phiri, I.A. (1987). A report of the east and central African inter- church consultation on primary school religious education held at Harare, Zimbabwe from 1st to 7th April 1986. *Religion in Malawi*, 1 (1), 33-34.

- Punch, K.F. (2009). *Introduction to research methods in education*. London: Sage Publications.
- Rao, S. P. (2008). *Human Values and Education*. New Delhi: Sterling.
- Ream, T.C. (2009). *Teaching about religion in public schools*. Baylor: Baylor University.
- Richardson, L. (2000). New writing practices in qualitative research. *Sociology of Sports Journal*, 17, 5-20.
- Ross, K. (1998). *Here comes your king! Christ, Church and nation of Malawi*. Blantyre: Kachere/CLAIM.
- Rudestam, K.E., & Newton, R.R. (2007). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process (3rd ed.)*. New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc.
- Rudge, L. (1988). "I am nothing" – Does it matter? A critique of current religious education policy and practice in England on behalf of the silent majority. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 20, 155-165.
- Salanjira, M. F. (2003). *Introduction and Reception of Religious education and Moral Education in Malawi secondary schools*. Unpublished master's dissertation, University of Malawi, Zomba.
- Salanjira, M. F. (2009). *Contesting spaces in Curriculum policy change: Exploring the dual-mode religious education in Malawi*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Sarantakos, S. (2005). *Social research (3rd ed.)*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research methods for business students (4th ed.)*. Harlow: Prentice Hill.
- Sincero, S.M. (2012). *Ecological systems theory*. Retrieved January 9, 2015, from: <https://explorable.com/users/sarah>.
- Smart, N. (1998). *The world's religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sookrajh, R., & Salanjira, M.F. (2009). Ideological posturing and national curriculum policy: Exploring dual-mode religious education for secondary schools in Malawi, *Alternation (Special Edition)*, 3, 68-90.

- Steyn, C. (2004). *Religion in life orientation*. Pretoria: UNISA Press.
- Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basic of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Streng, F. J. (1985). *Understanding Religious Life*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Stringer, S. (2004). *Action research in education*. New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Summers, H.C. (1996). Religious education: The problem in South Africa. In H.C. Summers & R.R. Waddington (Eds.). *Religious education for transformation*. Pretoria: KagisoTertiary.
- Summers, H.C., & Waddington, R.R. (Eds.). (1996). *Religious education for transformation*. Pretoria: KagisoTertiary.
- Taflinger, R.F. (2011). *Introduction to research*. Retrieved June 5, 2015 from: [richt@turbonet.com](mailto:richt@turbonet.com)
- Tan, C. (2008). Creating 'good citizens' and maintaining religious harmony in Singapore. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30, 133-142.
- Taylor, S.J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meaning (2nd ed.)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tullock, S. (1993). *Oxford complete word finder*. London: Readers Digest.
- UNICEF (2013). *Education in Somalia*. UNICEF, Retrieved March 16, 2014, from: [www.unicef.org/somaliaeducation.html](http://www.unicef.org/somaliaeducation.html)
- Van Manen, J. (1979). *Qualitative methodology*. Retrieved April 8, 2014, from: [www.deepdive.com/ip/sage/book-review](http://www.deepdive.com/ip/sage/book-review)
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. New York: State University of New York.
- Walters, P. (2010). *Editorial: Religion state and society*, 33, 201-208.
- Wardekker, W.L. & Miedemas, S. (2007). Identity, cultural change and religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 22 (2), 76-82.

Wisker, G. (2008). *The post graduate research handbook (2nd ed.)*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wood , A. (1984). Religious education. In A. Graft and G. Bardell (Eds.). *Curriculum opportunities in multicultural society (pp.74- 91)*. London: Happer and Row Ltd.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A1: Interview guide for BK teachers

1. In your opinion, what are some of the reasons why some learners drop BK at senior secondary school after taking it at junior secondary school level?
2. What is your opinion on the content of Bible Knowledge at both junior and senior secondary school levels?
3. What do you think should be included or removed in the BK syllabus so that learners should like the subject?
4. In your own understanding, what would you say is the perception of your students towards Bible Knowledge lessons and why?
5. What is your role in a multi-religious secondary school education in relation to the students dropping of the BK subject?
6. What challenges do you face as you teach Bible Knowledge?
7. In relation to your experience of teaching Bible Knowledge, what strategies do you use to teach Bible Knowledge concepts in order to overcome the challenges encountered?
8. What do you think are the main reasons that make students drop Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level?
9. Do the methods used in teaching BK provoke pupils' critical thinking? If so why? If not, why not?

**Res.** This is the end of our discussion. Thank you so much for your participation. Have a good day.



## **Appendix A2: Interview guide for Head Teachers**

1. What has been the enrolment of BK students at both junior and senior secondary school level for the past three years?
  2. What do you think are the main reasons that make students drop Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level?
  3. What has been the students' performance during national examinations at both junior and senior secondary levels for the past three years?
  4. What challenges has been reported to you so far that your teachers and students face during the teaching and learning of Bible Knowledge?
  5. What are your suggestions towards the improvement in the enrolment of students in Bible Knowledge at senior secondary school level?
- Res.** This is the end of our discussion. Thank you so much for your participation. Have a good day.

## **Appendix B1: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide for Form 3 Learners**

1. In your view, what are some of the reasons why some students drop BK at senior Secondary school level after taking it at junior level?

Mukuona kwanu, ndizifukwa ziti zimene ana a sukkulu sapitilizila ndi phunziro la baibulo mumakalasi aakulu aku sekondale?

2. What is your opinion on the content of Bible Knowledge?

Maganizo anu ndiotani pa zomwe mumaphunzira paphunziro la baibulo?

3. What were the problems/challenges you came across when learning Bible Knowledge?

Kodi ndi mavuto ati amene mumakumana nawo mukamaphunzira phunziro la baibulo?

4. What are your suggestions on how Bible Knowledge should be taught, its relevance to life, or career of learners?

Maganizo anu ndiwotani pa phunziro la baibulo, ndilofunika pa moyo wanu, kapena tsogolo la ophunzira?

5. What were the main reasons that made you drop the subject at senior secondary school level?

Ndi zifukwa ziti zenizeni zimene munasiyira kuphunzira phunziro la baibulo pa MSCE?

6. What do you think should be included or removed in the Bible Knowledge syllabus?

Mukuganiza kuti zimene zingawonjezedwe kapena kuchotsedwa mu silabasi ya baibulo ndi chiyani?

7. Do you have any other views about BK and why some students drop BK at senior secondary after taking it at junior level?

Muli ndi maganizo wotani pa phunziro la baibulo ndiponso chifukwa chiyani ophunzira amasiya pa MSCE pamene amaphunzira pa JCE?

**Res.** This is the end of our discussion. Thank you so much for your participation. Have a good day.

## Appendix C1: Permission letter

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI



Chancellor College

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES

**To:** Whom It May Concern  
**From:** Head of Curriculum and Teaching Studies Department  
**Date:** 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014

---

### Letter of Introduction for Modesta Wezzie Simwaka

This is a letter of introduction for Modesta Wezzie Simwaka as our Master of Education student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education, Chancellor College. She is doing research for her thesis as part of the requirements for an award of M.Ed. She will need assistance to access and collect information for her study. Please assist her accordingly.

For further information, please contact the undersigned.

Many thanks

**Dr. A. Chauma**  
**Deputy Head of Curriculum and Teaching Studies Department**  
**Chancellor College**



## Appendix C2: Permission letter

Telephone: (265) 01 912 437/870 766  
Fax: (265) 01 870 821  
E-mail: swed@sndp.org.mw

All correspondences should be addressed to:  
**The Education Division Manager**



*In reply please quote ref no.SWED/1/1*

SOUTH WEST EDUCATION DIVISION  
PRIVATE BAG 386  
CHICHIRI  
BLANTYRE 3  
MALAWI

5<sup>th</sup> June 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

### **AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

I write to kindly request your office to allow MODESTA WEZZIE SIMWAKA to undertake research activities at your institution.

She is currently a Master of Education student in Curriculum and Teaching Studies in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education, Chancellor College, University of Malawi.

I would be most grateful if she is given all the necessary support and guidance so that her research activities are carried out successfully.

I look forward to your usual support and hoping at the same time that you will accord this request all the attention and urgency that it deserves.

  
CAROLINE CHIPHINGA MWALE

**FOR: EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (SWED)**



## **Appendix D1: Sample of an extract of semi structured interview for BK**

### **Teacher 2**

**Res** = Researcher

**BKT**= BK Teacher

**Res:** In your opinion, what are some of the reasons why some learners drop BK at senior secondary level after taking it at junior secondary school level?

**BKT:** There are a few reasons which I can be able to explain why students drop BK at senior secondary school level. One of the reasons is that our students are lazy and they regard BK as a difficult subject because has a lot of content.

**Res:** What do you mean by saying that the subject has a lot of content?

**BKT:** If you look at junior BK syllabus, it has got almost the whole bible. Old Testament starts from Genesis up to Malachi and in the New Testament there about two books to study that is too much to a student. They consider BK as one of the subjects which is tiresome. After being forced to take it at junior secondary school, at senior they decide not to take it since they are given chance to choose subjects.

Our ministry is also to blame for contributing to the student dropping of BK. The ministry is not encouraging students to take BK. It is only encouraging them to take science subjects. This is to tell our students that BK is not important. That is why students drop it in their large numbers.

Students also think that BK is only for those who want to become pastors. They think that the subject is not important in their future life. This means BK has no job opportunities.

Again the subject does not have enough teaching and learning materials. Like here the whole school has only five bibles. That is, we use these five bibles from form1 to form 4. Most students have chance to read the bible and some students

are not Christians which means they do not have bibles in their homes. These students they just listen to what the teacher is reading and they become bored. When they come to Form 3 they just decide to drop the subject. Apart from the Bible, the subject does not have books as it is the case with other subjects.

**Res:** As a school what have you done so far to eradicate the problem of teaching and learning materials?

**BKT:** As school we have tried to buy some bibles but they are expensive we cannot manage to buy five bibles at once because more funds are allocated to science subjects. This has pulled the interest of the students in BK because they see that other subjects have materials. Their conclusion is that BK is not important hence dropping it.

## **Appendix D2: Sample of an extract of semi-structured interview for Head Teacher 3**

**Res** = Researcher

**HT** = Head Teacher

**Res:** What has been the enrollment at both junior and senior secondary school levels here for the past three years?

**HT:** I am not in a position to give the number because am new to this school and I failed to find the information as regard to this question. But generally what I know is that at junior level almost all the students take all the subjects. No student is allowed to drop any subject. That is why at junior the number of students taking BK is bigger than at senior secondary. At senior level they are given chance to choose the subjects and BK is one of the subjects that is being dropped.

**Res:** What do you think are the main reasons that make students drop BK at senior secondary school level?

**HT:** Reasons could be many. One of them is that at junior level they are being forced to take the BK whether they like or not. Now when they go to form 3 and form 4 they have a chance to choose the subjects and it is found that BK is regarded as elective subject and students find it easy to drop it.

The other reason is that most teachers who teach BK are not willing to teach the subject because they are not specialised. In most schools teachers who teach BK are few and not specialists. Most of those who opt to assist, find it easier to teach at junior level. When it comes to senior level most teachers refuse to teach BK because they find it difficult. As a result students are discouraged to continue with the subject hence they drop. Sometimes teachers themselves advise the students not to take the subject because there are no qualified teachers to teach the subject.

Parents sometimes advise their children not to take BK but rather take science subjects that can give them white collar jobs. As result most students have dropped BK because they listen to what their parents say.



**Res:** what do you mean when you say parents want their children to be somebody else after school?

**HT:** Parents wants their children to go for a good course after school and find a good job because most parents think in BK there are no courses that can help their children to find a good job after school. In other words, parents choose subjects for their children.

This is also true with the current situation in terms of employment system. Many professions opt for science subjects more than humanities. As a result in most adverts they would say we want science subjects and automatically they make students to drop humanities subjects and BK in particular. Government has contributed to the drop because it is encouraging science subjects.

### **Appendix D3: Sample of an extract of focus group discussion for form 3 Learners**

**Res =** Researcher

**Res:** Inuyo mukuona, kwanu ndizifukwa ziti zimene ana a sukulu sapitilizira ndi phunziro la baibulo m'makalasi aakulu aku sekondale?

**Learner:** Ine ndinayisiya chifukwa chosintha sintha aphunzitsi. Zimene zimachitika ndi zakuti, term iyi aphunzitsi ena, term inanso aphunzitsi ndi ena. Ndiye zimakhala zovuta kuyisatira bwino bwino. Ine Ndichifukwa chake ndinayisiya nditafika form 3.

**Learner:** Ophunzira ambiri akafika form 3 amanena kuti ndikatenga BK ntchito yake idzakhala chani pakuti ndi ntchito imene ndikufuna ine sizikugwirizana ndi BK. Ndichifukwa chake amayisiya.

**Res:** Inuyo mumadziwa bwanji kuti BK siigwirizana ndi ntchito imene mukufuna kutsogolo?

**Learner:** Ntchito zake zimakhalangati Accounting kaya Business, m'menemu mulibiletu za BK koma masamu.

**Res:** Ananu mukuti bwanji?

**Learner:** Komanso monga mu kalasi yathu, timaphunzira French ndi BK. Ndiye anatigawa, ana ena amaphunzira BK ena French, ine ndinafuna kuti ndi phunzire BK koma chifukwa choti panali ma subject awiri pa nthawi imodzi basi ndimangophunzira chimene anandigwawira imene ili French kusiya BK.

**Learner:** Ine ndinaona kuti mu BK mulibe ntchito imene ndimayifuna. Ndimona kuti BK ndi ya anthu amene akufuna kuzakhala a busa. Ndichifukwa chake ndinayisiya kuti ndipange kaye ma subject omwe azandithandiza ku tsogolo.

**Res:** Nanga enanu mukuti bwanji? ndizifukwa ziti zimene ana a sukulu sapitilizira ndi phunziro la baibulo m'makalasi aakulu aku sekondale?

**Learner:** Ana a sukulu ambiri amasiya BK chifukwa imakhala ndi zolembe zambiri. Ine ndi m'modzi wawo, ndinayisiya chifukwa ndinaona kuti mu BK mwachuluka zoloweza kwambiri ndipo zolembe zimachuluka kwambiri.

**Res:** zimene mukunenazi ndizaku form 2. munadziwa bwanji kuti ku form 3 zolembe ndi zambiri?

**Learner:** Ine ndinadziwa kuti ku form 3 zolembe ndizambiri chifukwa anzanga anandiuza kuti ku form 3 BK ilinso ndi zowerenga zambiri. Ndiye

ndinapanga chisankho kuti pa form 3sindikayitenga, ndi chifukwa chake ndinayisiya.

**Learner:** Komanso kuti muonetsetse, aphunzitsi a BK amasowa. Ku form 2 nthawi zambiri tinkangophunzitsidwa ndi aphunzitsi woti sanaphunzire za BK. Ndiye maphunzitsidwe awo ankakhala apatalipatali. ndichifukwa chake pa form 3 ndinayisiya. Sindinafuno kuzalakwa pa form 4 ngati mmene sindinakhozere bwino pa form 2.

**Learner:** Ine ndinayisiya chifukwa anatipatsa mwayi wosankha maphunziro pa form 3 Pamene ku form 2 kuja amatikakamiza kuti tilembe maphunziro onse.