TEACHING PRACTICE AS A COMPONENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN MALAWI: AN ACTIVITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the product of my own work, which has not, whether in the same or a different form, been presented to this or any other university in support of an application for any degree other than that of which I am now a candidate.

Signed:……………………………………….

Peter David Galimoto Mtika

2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

For

My late father

My mother

Yebo

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BC	Bunda College
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
EFA	Education for All
FPE	Free Primary Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
INSET	In-service Education and Training
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
MCDE	Malawi College of Distance Education
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MPRSP	Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
MUSTER	Multi-Site Teacher Education Research
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PIF	Policy Investment Framework
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Culture Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPE	Universal Primary Education

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research is an exploration of the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice as a component of initial teacher education in Malawi. The research was necessitated by a general lack of knowledge about secondary school teacher education in Malawi and the view that teaching practice is one of the major components of concern for professional learning among student teachers. An activity theory perspective provided a theoretical and conceptual lens of understanding teaching practice. The elements within activity theory which were of particular significance related to **tools/artefacts, subjects**, **objects** and **outcomes** in teaching practice; **rules/norms** within an activity system of teaching practice; **perceptions** of individuals about teacher education and a teaching activity; pedagogical **actions** and understanding during teaching practice; the **community** relationships in school systems where student teachers carried out teaching practice; **division of tasks**; **activity settings**; **tensions**/**contradictions**, as well as **innovations** within the activity of teaching practice (Engeström, 1999). The participants in the study were drawn mainly from student teachers on a three-year teacher education programme at one of the teacher education institutions in Malawi.

The results from the study showed that the student teachers had different perceptions for teaching as well as differing goals for joining a secondary school teacher education programme; that student teachers had varied experiences during teaching practice and the varied experiences influenced learning to teach in various ways. The shortage of material resources impeded some activities that student teachers could carry out. The findings showed that some pedagogical tools that student teachers had learned in college were not always easily used in the schools. The community relationships between student teachers and teachers in the schools affected professional development in some way. The supervision component of teaching practice also generated mixed experiences from student teachers.

The study participants proposed innovations aimed at resolving some of the tensions and contradictions faced during teaching practice. The innovations related to facilitative supervision, holistic assessment, changing the time and duration of teaching practice as well as student teachers' placements. The enriched understanding of the experiences of the student teachers makes significant contribution to knowledge within teacher education in Malawi.

Keywords: Activity theory, teacher education, teaching practice, student teachers, qualitative inquiry

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Teaching practice is one of the most influential components in the preparation of pre-service teachers (Clark *et al.,* 1985; Graham, 2006; Koehler, 1988; Lemma, 1993; Tang, 2003). Yet researchers have noted that teaching practice can have positive and negative consequences on student teachers (e.g. Koehler, 1988; Korthagen, *et al.,* 2006; Sabar, 2004). In addition, teaching practice experiences have been routinely criticized (Edmundson, 1990; Feiman-Nemser and Buchman, 1983; Tang, 2003; Tickle, 2000; Wilson, 2006). This suggests that there is need for more research on the conduct and nature of teaching practice. The need for more research is particularly essential in countries where there has been no tangible research on secondary school teaching practice such as Malawi.

This qualitative research study was directed towards understanding student teachers' experiences during teaching practice in Malawi. The participants in the study were drawn from two cohorts of student teachers on a three-year teacher education programme at Masambiro College (pseudonym). The exploration of the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice was composed from 'rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions' (Patton, 2002: 438). The study took a cross-case approach and this allowed the collection of comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth data about the two cohorts of student teachers (Patton, 2002: 447).

An activity theory framework provided conceptual and theoretical tools to organize an inquiry into understanding the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. Specifically, an activity theory framework considers subjects, the mission of their activity, the tools used to perform an activity, the rules that guide the activity, the community involved in the activity, the division of tasks and the settings in which an activity system is located. This distinguishes it from theoretical perspectives that assume that teaching is a solitary profession (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). An activity theory perspective also focuses on contextual factors that influence the development of subjects in the process of professionally learning an activity. It offers an understanding of how particular environments shape and guide subjects towards particular thinking, beliefs and practices. An activity theory perspective may help to understand the subjects' accomplishment within an activity system (Grossman *et al.,* 1999).

1.1 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis has been organized in a number of chapters and ancillary sections. It is necessary that to outline the areas that each chapter and subsequent sections cover at this early juncture**.**

Chapter One presents the introduction to the study. In this chapter I introduce most of the major issues that form the focus of my study. These issues, not necessarily in the order of importance, include: the statement of the problem, the research aim, objectives and the research questions of the study. In the same chapter I introduce the theoretical framework and the methodological approach that guides this study. Furthermore, I address the educational context of Malawi as well as the background to the study. In the chapter I also underline the significance of the study to Malawi in particular and to teacher education in general.

Chapter Two presents a discussion of secondary education, secondary school teaching and teacher education in Malawi. I also address the central policies that have guided the development of secondary education in the aftermath of the 1994 democratic elections in Malawi. This is followed by a discussion the status of secondary education in Malawi and their implications. In addition, I address the international policy discourse of gender and secondary education. This is in relation to EFA, MDGs as well as the contribution of gendered secondary education to national development.

Chapter Three forms a review of an international literature of school teachers, teacher education and teaching practice. This discussion is concerned with issues that relate to student teachers' motivations for teaching. In this chapter, I discuss mentoring and learner-centred pedagogy in initial teacher education. I also expose some of the critical issues regarding initial experiences of novice teachers as well as the conceptualization of teaching practice. The other part of the chapter addresses teaching practice *per se* and some the conceptual aspects of teaching practice that were significant in this study. The aspects I discuss were crucial in relation to the theoretical framework I adopted in the study.

Chapter Four is an examination of the perspective of an activity theory framework that underpin this study. The chapter examines the origins of the socio-cultural activity theory, the key conceptual elements of the theory. In addition, this chapter explains the suitability and applicability of the perspectives of an activity theory framework to student teachers during secondary school teaching practice.

Chapter Five is a discussion of the research methodology I adopted in this study. The chapter examines qualitative research paradigm as selected for this study. In the chapter, I

discuss qualitative inquiry in terms of the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study. Furthermore, I discuss the sampling strategy of purposive sampling as used in the study and the implications before discussing some of the critical issues regarding data collection. In the chapter, I also present the research participants and some of their biographical information. The fundamental issues regarding data collection which I tackled in the chapter relate to epistemological, ethical and methodological principles.

Chapter Six discusses some of the practical issues of data collection in the study. The other issues I discuss in the chapter relate to the setting and the selection of participants in the study, the means of negotiating and obtaining access to Masambiro College, the study participants and secondary schools. In the chapter I trace the data collection procedures that I adopted. I further explore qualitative data analysis. I consider categorical analysis as a technique for data analysis and how it was applied to interview data, observation data, documents, field notes and critical incident data within an activity theory framework. I also discuss the researcher reflexivity in relation to data collection and interpretation in the chapter.

Chapter Seven presents an analysis and discussion of research findings related to the goals for joining teacher education programme as well as perceptions of the teaching profession by the student teachers who participated in the study. The findings I analyze and discuss in this chapter are from both third year and second year cohorts of student teachers who participated in the study at four secondary schools in central Malawi.

Chapter Eight presents the analysis and discussion of research findings specific to the third year cohort of student teachers who conducted teaching practice at Limbani secondary school (pseudonym). The chapter addresses research findings on the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice within the perspectives of an activity theory framework. There were several aspects of teaching practice and elements of an activity theory framework which I considered in presenting and discussing the findings.

Chapter Nine presents the analysis and discussion of research findings specific to second year cohort of student teachers who conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school (pseudonym). The chapter addresses research findings on the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice based on the perspectives of an activity theory framework. Just like in **Chapter Eight**, there were also several aspects of teaching practice and elements of an activity theory framework which I considered in presenting and discussing the findings.

Chapter Ten is a discussion of the summaries and conclusions of this study. In this chapter, I draw on the cross-case findings from second and third year cohorts of student teachers at Limbani and Gawani secondary schools as analysed and discussed in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**. I also engage in a more critical discussion of teacher education development and suggest some potential practical and policy recommendations for initial teacher education in Malawi. Furthermore, I discuss the claim of originality in the study as well as some of the limitations of the research before making concluding remarks of the whole thesis.

1.2 Statement of the problem

This study was conducted to explore experiences of student teachers during secondary school teaching practice in Malawi. Teaching practice has been viewed as an important component of teacher education in some countries in the developed world. Tisher (1990), focusing on teacher education in Australia, claimed that:

> School experiences are extremely important, practical, satisfying component of pre-service education…student teachers say they gain a lot from it; that it is the most realistic aspect of their courses, helps reduce their anxiety about teaching, and fosters their practical teaching skills (Tisher, 1990: 75).

Another important view of the teaching practice was expressed by White (1989) who saw it as a 'rite of passage' which allows neophytes to acquire cultural knowledge about teaching. Even though teaching practice tends to be highly valued by student teachers and practitioners, questions concerning the value of professional learning from these experiences have been raised (Feiman-Nemser and Buchman, 1983). Edmundson (1990), for instance, claimed that student teachers' experiences do not provide opportunities for reflective inquiry. Tom (1987) argued that teacher education curricula should replace pedagogical knowledge with pedagogical questioning, using the reality of the teaching as their starting point and addressing both moral and craft elements of teaching.

The literature from Germany has viewed the teaching practice as a necessary and valuable, though, also doubtful component of teacher education programme (Klinzig, 1990). In Germany the supervised practice is central part of *studienseminar,* a mandatory postgraduate component of the education process focusing on induction into school life. These issues demonstrate how contestable teaching practice is and essentially calls for more research into teaching practice as a component of teacher education.

There is a dearth of research on secondary teacher education in Malawi. Most of the research that has been conducted in Malawi pertains to primary school teachers (see MUSTER

Discussion Papers on Malawi). This is against the background of shortage of secondary school teachers in Malawi largely due to higher teacher attrition as well as the expansion of the primary school sector.

Recently, large numbers of teachers who tend to leave teaching are the young professionals who have graduated in secondary school teacher education (Kamchedzera, 2004). The University of Malawi carried out a tracer study of secondary school teachers who graduated from Chancellor College, the main constituent college of the University of Malawi. According to Kamchedzera (2004) most of the teachers who graduated from the college in the years 2000 to 2003 were not in secondary schools because they had resigned and picked up other [irrelevant] jobs elsewhere. This assertion is supported by other studies. It has been argued that beginning teachers tend to leave teaching earlier than, among others, beginning nurses (Hayter, 2000) or beginning pharmacists (Gupchup *et al.,* 1998). A number of factors are associated with this situation, including pre-service professional growth and social integration into teaching (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Chapman, 1983; Chapman and Green, 1983).

There is need, therefore, to explore secondary school teacher education and teaching practice, in particular, as one way of understanding pre-service professional growth and social integration. Research from elsewhere has established that school conditions contribute to decision to stay or leave the teaching profession (Weller-Ferris, 1999). Teaching practice is an element of school and training condition and it may affect the lives of student teachers within the school organization. This element of training condition deserves research attention. Teaching practice conditions are integral aspects of student teachers' lives, and to a large extent, they shape the beliefs and thinking of teachers (Weller-Ferris, 1999). There is need, therefore, to explore teaching practice and the conditions and activities associated with it. This also involves exploring roles that stakeholders such as school teachers, pupils and college supervisors play during teaching practice.

Generally speaking, one of the major values underpinning studies involving student teachers is that such studies increase the visibility and usability of student teachers' perspectives. This is important because in many educational changes and reforms undertaken around the world, teachers' perspectives too are subjected to an imposed series of innovations and policy directives, with little attention paid to issues of implementation (Goodson, 2003). Research studies of student teachers' lives and experiences provide a powerful tool to unveil what it means to be a student teacher on teaching practice in Malawi. I need to focus on the activities

of teaching practice in relation to what student teachers go through. By focusing on student teachers' 'lived' experiences during teaching practice, I could be attempting to provide 'new' moves and perspectives to restructure reform and reconceptualize teacher education programmes in Malawi. This possibly will avoid the making of prescriptions and educational policy changes that work against the context of the reality of student teachers (Goodson, 2003).

Teacher educators need to be aware of the knowledge base of teaching, theories of teacher development, and how best to teach student teachers and conduct teaching practice so that they (prospective teachers) are prepared for effective teaching. The knowledge of concerns of student teachers about teaching practice and school conditions could inform the process of teacher education programme design. Student teachers who believe that teacher education addresses significant questions about their future teaching career may have an easier and smoother transition into the classroom, may find their coursework more relevant and beneficial, may be able to transfer more of their formal education into real world of the classroom.

Thus, a study of experiences of student teachers with particular focus on teaching practice, roles that stakeholders play during teaching practice, supervision of teaching practice, and other activities during teaching practice, could provide useful insight to address concerns related to student teachers experiences, thinking and belief development in the teaching profession. The multifaceted nature of teaching practice also calls for the use of an appropriate theoretical framework which could interrogate various aspects of professional learning during teaching practice. This is where the use of an activity theory perspective as a theoretical framework in the study is important.

1.3 Research aims, objectives and questions

1.3.1 Research aims

It is important to note that the research aims in this study blend well with the purposes of teacher research as conceptualized by various authors (see Cochran-Smith and Lyte, 1993; Fishman and McCarthy, 2000; Hopkins, 1993) who have clustered a range of widely shared views of the purposes and ideas of teacher research around two key concepts. One is about enhancing teachers' sense of professional role and identity and the other is the idea that engaging in teacher research can contribute to better quality teacher preparation, teaching and learning in classrooms and school improvement (Cochran-Smith and Lyte, 1993; Fishman and McCarthy, 2000; Hopkins, 1993).

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in Malawi using perspectives from an activity theory framework. I had to explore experiences of student teachers during teaching practice by striving to understand the student teachers' perceptions of teacher education and teaching. In addition, I had to strive to understand the relationships of the student teachers within and across the activity settings of the teaching practice component. I also attempted to understand the concept of innovation with regard to student teachers' experiences during the teaching practice component. A study using an activity theory framework may help identify some of the underlying **contradictions/tensions** that may produce failures, disruptions or necessitate innovations. By identifying **contradictions/tensions** in the activity system, I may be more effective at developing ways to encourage the production of innovations within teacher education as an activity system (Engeström, 1999; Wertsch, 1981).

1.3.2 Research objectives and questions

The research objectives in the study were:

(1)   To explore perceptions of prospective secondary school teachers regarding the teaching activity. Under this research objective, I formulated the following research questions:

  (a)   What were the goals of student teachers for joining a secondary school teacher education programme?

  (b)   What were the views of student teachers regarding the teaching profession?

(2)   To examine relationships within and across activity settings in which student teachers carry out teaching practice. Under this research objective, I formulated the following research questions:

  (a)   How did activity systems within teaching practice influence the ways in which student teachers developed in teaching?

  (b)   How did student teachers experience and think about activity settings of teaching practice?

  (c)   How did the conduct of teaching practice explain contradictions/tensions of student teachers?

(3)   To explore innovations that stakeholders propose for the activity settings of teaching practice. Under this research objective, I formulated the following research question:

(a)   How did student teachers and supervisors envision the activity system of teaching practice?

1.4 Theoretical framework of the study

In terms of a theoretical standpoint, this study employed perspectives from an activity theory framework (Engeström, 1999) to examine experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. An activity theory framework provides tools to organize an inquiry into understanding an activity as it considers the actors or subjects and their actions as a system; the mission of their activity; the tools or artifacts used to perform the activity; the rules that guide that activity; the community involved in the activity; the division of tasks, and the activity setting, or in other words, 'who does what and how they do it' in an identified activity (Engeström, 1999). Notably, an activity theory framework emphasizes inherent disturbances, conceptually known as *contradictions/tensions*, in an activity under study.

An activity theory framework also focuses on the social and cultural factors that influence individuals in an activity. This distinguishes it from theoretical perspectives that assume that teaching is a solitary profession (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). It offers an understanding of how particular environments shape and guide subjects toward particular thinking, beliefs and practices in a professional activity they undertake. The theoretical framework of the study is discussed in more details in **Chapter Four**.

1.5 Methodology of the study

In order to explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice, I employed a qualitative research design. According to Silverman (2005) qualitative research designs tend to work with relatively small number of cases. Qualitative researchers 'are prepared to sacrifice scope for detail' (Silverman, 2005: 9). The detail in qualitative research is found in the precise particulars of such matters as people's understandings and interactions. This is the case because qualitative research tends to use a non-positivist model of reality.

A qualitative research also lends itself to exploring a phenomenon or the perspective on *what is going on* in a specific topic, as well as presenting detailed views of a phenomenon as it takes place in its natural setting (Creswell, 1998). On the contrary, the use of quantitative methods to examine a phenomenon calls for the use of pre-determined categories of analysis that may undermine levels of depth, detail, and openness (Patton, 2002). Those constraints could hinder the development of vivid examination of the experiences of student teachers

during teaching practice. The methodological issues that guided this study are discussed in more details in **Chapter Five** and **Chapter Six**.

1.6 Significance of the study

> Public concern over the quality of education and the strong press to improve overall pupils' achievement in schools make scholarly work on teachers' lives manifested through [student] teachers' career paths, and doing the work of teaching particularly timely (Lipsky, 1980: no page).

I would like to point out that while many studies have been conducted in the developed world and some developing countries on teacher education, rarely have studies on teaching practice been carried out in Malawi. There is very little research around secondary teacher education in Malawi. The absence of any rigorous study on secondary school teacher education is manifested by a general lack of literature. It would be necessary to conduct such studies in Malawi with a view of understanding teacher education because it may not be advisable to transfer findings from other studies conducted elsewhere and generalize the findings on the Malawi teacher education sector. Studies that address issues of secondary teacher education must be conducted in settings where fewer or no studies have been conducted at all. This could help enrich the debates and the corpus of validated research findings in the area of teacher education. Approaches that are currently influential in studying individuals' professional learning such as activity theory, should be used in order to benefit from what these theories offer to teacher education. Importantly, qualitative inquiry and activity theory focus on specific settings of a professional learning activity under study.

The importance of this study is that it provides a Malawian perspective to teaching practice and student teachers' professional experiences. This study focuses on secondary school teaching practice whereas studies that have been conducted in Malawi have focused on primary school education without necessarily addressing issues that affect secondary school teachers (e.g. Croft, 2002; Croft, 2006; Kunje, Lewin and Stuart, 2003). This has been the case possibly because over the last two decades governments, including that of Malawi and international agencies have invested heavily in improving quantity and quality of primary education with the view of achieving universal primary education (UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 1999) as well as Millennium Development Goals (MGDs). Most governments in the developing world and international assistance agencies seem to have largely neglected secondary education in favour of investment in primary education (UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 1999).

This study therefore contributes to the currently limited research base that focuses on the context of secondary education in Malawi by providing detailed exploration of student teachers' experiences during their professional learning. In addition, the findings offer insights into the learning conditions of student teachers to stakeholders and provide suggestions to improve the organisation of teaching practice.

It is significant to increase our understanding of how secondary school teaching practice is experienced because this may assist teacher educators to improve the preparation of future teachers where shortfalls in the teacher education programmes have been identified. The secondary school teaching practice is important both for the well-being and future professional successes of teachers. This is also important for promoting teacher retention. This is usually the case where successful secondary school teaching practice placements promote effective teaching after graduation and the desire to remain in teaching.

Fundamentally, an inquiry into the experiences of student teachers during field teaching practice is supported by the propositions put forth by several researchers that many of the factors related to job satisfaction and role-related problems of beginning teachers fall under the context of teacher education (inherently, the design of the teaching practice) (Morvant *et al.,* 1995; Stempien and Loeb, 2002). These authors proposed that a properly designed teacher education programme could diminish challenges and, in turn, could increase professional learning. Increased professional learning and development can be related to high levels of commitment and intent to stay in the teaching profession especially for novice teachers (Brownell *et al*., 1997; Morvant *et al.,* 1995; Weller-Ferris, 1999).

It is important to examine student teachers' views of their experiences of teaching practice and understand the impact of teaching practice on professional development. This is particularly the case because Malawi and other developing countries have embarked on educational reform with the view of realising the MDGs in education by the year 2015. The attainment of MDGs in education calls for quality teacher education at both primary school and secondary school levels. The achievement of UPE requires adequate and qualified teachers in schools. For student teachers to develop in the profession, they do not only require personal skills and knowledge, but they also need appropriate assets, rules of engagement, tools, social networks and community support, and personal motivators, among others. Most of what student teachers may need during teaching practice is captured in their activity system as conceptualised in an activity theory framework (see **Figure 4.2**).

An exploration of teaching practice may possibly provide a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which teacher education (and teaching practice design) contributes to professional development. This is the case because student teachers' professional development is broadly conceived as the interaction between the teacher-learner and the teaching practice context. Zeichner (1996) highlighted the necessity to have 'an educative practicum'. Other scholars argue for the importance of good teaching practice placements (Beck and Kosnik, 2002; Bursten, 1992; Clark, 2002; Potthoff and Alley, 1995) that foster productive field experiences.

The experiences of student teachers during teaching practice depend, at least in part, on an environment that responds to their developmental needs. It has been stressed that student teachers who are formally initiated into the profession stand a better chance of developing norms encouraging self-perpetuating growth and are more likely to develop greater commitment to teaching (Rosenholtz, 1989). In order to address specific concerns associated with teaching practice, a greater understanding of the experiences of student teachers is needed. It is imperative, therefore, to focus on student teachers' secondary school placement environments in order to offer some insight on how student teachers are influenced by teaching practice environments in their professional growth.

1.7 Overview of the context of the study

1.7.1 The Malawi context

Malawi is a landlocked country located in South-Eastern Africa. It is a former British colony which gained independence in 1964 and assumed Republican status in 1966. Malawi ranks 163 out of 174 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2004), meaning that it is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its per capita gross national product is estimated at US$230. Agricultural production is the backbone of its economy and accounts for 38 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This involves 91 % of the labour force. The country's GDP growth rate varies widely from year to year depending on crop conditions and world prices for its major exports of tobacco and tea.

In Malawi, most of the active population is self-employed in subsistence agriculture with periods of seasonal under-employment related to farming cycle. However, due to a high illiteracy rate, most people who are self employed in subsistence agriculture rely largely on traditional agricultural practices that may not give the best returns. The country's budget largely benefits from its bilateral donor community. The country's population was 9.9 million in 1998 and is characterized by high fertility rates, low life expectancy rates, high

population density, low literacy rates and high maternal and mortality rates. Malawi's HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of around 16.4 % of people between the ages of 15-49 years is among the highest in the world (UNDP, 2004).

Historically, the country's post-independence period witnessed huge burden that were placed on the teaching service. The end of the colonial era brought new demands for education. The school sectors had to expand at an unprecedented rate and needed to be staffed. The demographic pressure and the practical difficulty of expanding teacher education in relation with the demand for schooling contributed to the chronic shortage of teachers in the early years of Malawi's independence (UNESCO, 1999). Malawi has had some of the lowest enrolment rates in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The gross enrolment rates averaged about 65% in the early 1990s and repeaters occupied 15-20% of all primary school places. It appears that more than 20% of grade 1 pupils drop-out before reaching grade 2. The number of pupils enrolled in grade 8, the end of the primary system, is currently about 17% of the number enrolled in grade 1, giving some idea of the magnitude of the attrition resulting from drop-out. Over the last two decades the transition rate into secondary schools from primary has rarely exceeded 10%. In 1996 about 120,000 pupils were in the final grade of primary schools and were competing for about 8000 new places in government secondary schools (UNESCO, 1999).

In 1994, the Malawi Government adopted a policy of Free Primary Education (FPE) designed to widen access to primary education. This resulted in a massive increase in the number of primary pupils–from about 1.9 million to about 3 million. Consequentially the proportion of the national education budget allocated to support primary schools has increased substantially. This placed severe constraints on the financing of the primary school system and generated a massive demand for increased teacher education for both primary and secondary school sectors (Malawi Government, 2001b).

Structurally, Malawi's school system consists of eight years of primary schooling followed by four years of secondary schooling. In principle, all children are eligible for free primary schooling provided through more than 3,700 primary schools. Progress through primary schools is determined by school promotion tests. In most grades repetition exceeds 15% and can be as high as 25%. Selection into secondary school is determined by the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations (PSLCE) (Malawi Government, 2001b). This allows less than 10% of those who sit for PSLCE to obtain secondary school places. Most enrolment is in government or grant-aided secondary schools (44,000). Over 100,000 pupils are enrolled

in Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) schools, which are largely supported by fee payments. These schools have been renamed Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS).

At the end of secondary education the Malawi School Certificate Examinations (MSCE) controls access to post-secondary school education and training. About 35% of pupils reaching this level pass these examinations in government schools but only 8% from MCDEs. About 1,000 students per year are admitted into university level courses in the University of Malawi (Malawi Government, 2000). Other students who fail to enter university education apply for post-secondary education qualifications at both public and private institutions. One of the institutions which attract many students is Masambiro College. This is the institution where I conducted this study. The college is fully funded and supported by the Malawi Government.

Malawi has formulated an educational policy that recognizes education as one of the major tools of national development. This belief in the importance of education is manifest in several ways. Remarkably, the Government of Malawi has produced an educational policy and investment framework (PIF). This policy document offer guidance to the developments in all education sectors (Malawi Government, 2001a).

1.7.2 My personal and professional development

It is necessary that I point out my personal and professional background in relation to this study. This is important because it helps put the study in proper personal and professional perspectives. I was first introduced to teaching as a profession when I was in primary school in one of the lakeshore districts of northern Malawi. One of my teachers thought that I could help him teach one of the classes he was assigned. He asked me to go with him to a standard five class to teach a topic in health education. When we got to the class, he told me he was going to watch me teach. I thought, well, this was only a joke. I was only a pupil myself and how was I going to teach? He told me that I would manage very well. I was encouraged by his confidence and went ahead and spoke to the sizeable number of pupils. I 'talked' on "germs". I do not know if the pupils understood my lesson but the teacher praised me for 'delivering' a wonderful lesson. I did not have a way to verify his claim.

I moved to another primary school. We used to meet as standard eight pupils for evening studies. I was assigned the responsibility of preparing for English exercises during these studies. Essentially, I had to ask and answer questions on English grammar. This brought me close to the teaching profession again. Later that year, I was selected to a mission national

secondary school. I faintly regarded teaching as a likely career. 'Unfortunately', I was selected to the University of Malawi to study for a bachelor of education degree. I pursued a bachelor of education degree specializing as a teacher of English and history.

Before I could graduate as a secondary school teacher, I had to undergo teaching practice. I conducted teaching practice for 14 weeks. During teaching practice, I thought there were a number of experiences which I felt were very important in the formation of effective teachers. I wondered how I benefited from my head of department. I wondered why there was no formal arrangement between the university and the school where I conducted teaching practice. I wondered how I could learn from other members of staff. I wondered about the amount of trust pupils had in me as a student teacher. I wondered how supervisors contributed to my professional development. I disagreed with one of the supervisors because of the remarks he had made about one of the lessons he observed me teach. He had pointed out that I had not properly concluded one of the lessons. I asked myself whether I was in the school to teach competently or learn to teach. From the look of things, my supervisors seemed to emphasize the former. I was also particularly puzzled that at the time I went for my teaching practice, there was no qualified teacher of English in the school. I thought I had qualified as a teacher before I could graduate. In addition, the school had a shortage of history teachers. The head of department pleaded with me that I teach History to form four pupils. Teaching an examination class was discouraged by supervisors and I was being asked by the school to teach an examination class. This seemed to tug me in different directions.

After passing a bachelor of education degree, I continued to teach at the same secondary school where I had conducted teaching practice for close to a year. Later, I got a staff associate position at Bunda College (BC), a constituent college of the University of Malawi. Bunda College was in the process of inaugurating a teacher education degree programme for teachers of agriculture. This position offered me an opportunity to become a teacher educator and to interrogate a number of issues that had affected my own professional development in the teaching profession.

When I went for my postgraduate studies, I could not interrogate teaching practice in detail. I thought the critical issue at that time was to design an innovation for an in-service education and training (INSET) of teachers of agriculture who had not done any initial teacher education. Nevertheless, I carried out a minor study on 'student teachers attitudes to teaching' during my research training module on my Master's programme. The participants

in that study were PGCE student teachers. I planned to conduct a major study around teaching practice whenever I got an opportunity to study for a doctoral degree.

1.7.3 Background to the study

The findings of qualitative research on any one topic in the social sciences almost always vary from one study to another; sometimes the results obtained may support a given hypothesis, while on other occasions the results may not support it; sometimes the support is strong while at other times it is weak; sometimes the results of one study actually contradict the findings of another (Hargreaves, 1995). The reasons for these variations are many. In the first place, the social or cultural context in which research is conducted may play a part in the results obtained. For example, in some cultures it is regarded as impolite for children to ask questions of adults such as teachers. It might be expected therefore that research would find that pupils ask questions in classrooms of that culture much less frequently than in another culture where the etiquette regarding questioning does not exist (Dunkin, 1995).

Secondly, results of testing a hypothesis or answering a question depend on conceptual and methodological variations in research. For example, teachers often ask rhetorical questions in the classroom. Researchers who inquire into the relationship between teacher' questioning and pupil learning have the problem of deciding whether to count such questions (Dunkin, 1995). Their results will depend in part on the conceptual and methodological decisions they make. The researcher who wants to establish the state of the art in research on teacher questions or any other aspect of teaching has to be aware of these types of variations and develop procedures for dealing with them in coming to general conclusions. Similarly, educational practitioners seeking guidance from research need to know how to take into account such influences on research results. Erroneous conclusions about accumulated evidence of a body of research can have disastrous consequences when action is taken based on those conclusions (Dunkin, 1995). On the other hand, real progress in the form of significantly improved professional practice can be the consequence of appropriate conclusions emerging from the synthesis of research.

I would like to stress that this study can be construed as unique. I conducted it in a developing country with a nascent teacher education programme that only came to effect in the mid 90s. Understandably, there are variations in teacher education between developed and developing countries, or indeed amongst developing countries. This may be the case because of the different philosophical, social and cultural contexts regarding teacher education. In the case of the developing countries, teacher education may also be influenced

by a whole lot of factors such as the amount of appropriate resource allocation available to teacher education, the quality of teacher educators and entrants to teacher education.

The developed nations, United States and United Kingdom, for example, have well elaborate arrangements for teaching practice. A lot of research has been undertaken in these countries in relation to teacher education. While the developing countries, such as Malawi, have a lot to learn from the findings from the research studies conducted in developed countries, these countries should also engage in research within their own geo-political, economic and socio-cultural contexts. This could help developing countries to synthesize research findings on teacher education and make informed and appropriate conclusions for adaptation in their countries. In this way they could find the most effective solutions to problems in teacher education. This could also help in making right conclusions about the accumulated evidence of a body of research that could have productive consequences when action is taken.

The teacher education literature world over is endowed with a plethora of research studies that have addressed fundamental issues of student teachers, beginning teachers and experienced teachers. However, most of the major research studies have been conducted in the developed world (e.g. Cole and Knowles, 1993; Dow, 1979; Fullan, 1982; Goodman, 1987; Lacey, 1977; Lortie, 1975; Roth and Tobin, 2002; Tang, 2003; Zeichner, 1996 etc). The literature on teacher education and teacher professional development directly addressing most of the fundamental issues about teachers in the developing world is scanty. It is important to state that some studies have been carried out in the developing world addressing issues of student teachers and beginning teachers (Akyeampong and Lewin, 2002; Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002; Hedges, 2002; Indoshi, 2003; Lefoka *et al.,* 2000 etc). The studies that have been conducted elsewhere have looked at student teachers in a teacher education college, during primary school teaching practice and also in their first years of professional teaching as newly qualified teachers (NQTs) or beginning teachers. The most important thing about these studies is that they shed light on the process of teacher education and development in a period of the student teacher transition. The need for similar studies in Malawi is, without doubt, overwhelming.

The secondary school teacher population in Malawi is changing dramatically in the current decade and the next decades given the projection for the need to recruit more teachers to handle huge enrolment increases as a result of FPE, replace an ageing teacher workforce-ready to retire, and respond to the chronic attrition of beginning teachers, and sometimes the poor quality of education that plague most of Malawi's secondary schools (Mtegha, 2004).

Given this period of massive educational expansion policy and the resultant increased enrolment in both primary and secondary schools, it is crucial to understand the perceptions of student teachers and their experiences especially during teaching practice, which contribute to student teachers commitment/dissatisfaction with teaching in order to effect appropriate changes to teacher education and secondary school conditions. The focus should be on, among other areas, teaching practice because it is closest to the actual work of teaching.

The provision of quality secondary school education in this era of expanded access to both primary and secondary education in Malawi relies on the availability of well-qualified teachers. For pupils who have benefited from FPE, the likelihood that adequately prepared teachers will teach them well (or teach them at all) in secondary school is diminished when one considers the number of teachers who leave the teaching profession in Malawi. The number of those leaving the teaching profession is massive when one considers that teacher education colleges are only able to train a very small number of teachers yearly. In fact a number of teacher positions in various subjects remain unoccupied in a number of secondary schools. This is a matter of concern for teacher educators and the government (Malawi Government, 2001b).

The ability of student teachers' college experiences and secondary school teaching practice to support their professional development determines the future quality of teachers and the output from secondary school education. To respond to high attrition rate there is need to focus attention on the special predicament of student teachers, who, more than any other group are most vulnerable to the effects of initial school teaching practice and workplace conditions. If problematic and unprofessional school teaching practice and workplace conditions contribute to teachers' leaving, they also may discourage prospective teachers from entering the profession in the first place (Darling-Hammond, 1984).

According to Ashton and Webb (1986) day-to-day morale and commitment to teaching as a career is not only associated with attrition rates overall but also with quality of teaching. Adverse teaching practice placements and workplace conditions may affect student teachers' commitment and intentions to stay and may leave an indelible imprint on the structure and quality of teaching and learning itself (Ashton and Webb, 1986). In addition to the need for properly qualified teachers to teach pupils in secondary schools, there is a piece of research evidence that points out that a well-prepared and qualified teacher can positively influence school improvement and school lives of pupils (Ashton and Webb, 1986).

1.7.4 Why Masambiro College?

No major research has been conducted on teaching practice for secondary school teachers at Masambiro College. This was one of the main reasons which persuaded me to carry out this study at the college. I also settled for Masambiro College because I had once been a 'cooperating teacher' to a student teacher from the college. In course of that role, I thought that it gave me some rudimentary views of the process of teaching practice as conceptualized by the college. During my own studies on a teacher education programme, I used to visit my friend who was studying there. We would discuss a number of critical issues about his programme and this led me to develop interest in the teacher education programme offered at the college.

Masambiro College is rated lower than the University of Malawi. This is the case because the college offers diploma qualification and also because, in most cases, students who end up at Masambiro College are those who fail to secure places in the university. The competition for entry in the University of Malawi and Mzuzu University is very stiff. Most candidates who do well at MSCE fail to enter university education because of the limited places. For example, when the University of Malawi announced the results of the 2007 University Entrance Examinations (UEE) in which a total of 4259 candidates sat for the UEE. Of this figure, 3206 were males and 1053 were females. Out of this number, 945 were selected, representing 22% of the potential candidates (University of Malawi, 2007). I have pointed this out because I would like to make it clear that there might not be major implications for the data in this study based on the different entry grades for the university and Masambiro College. According to Darling-Hammond (1990) there are no major implications for the seemingly lower test scores for prospective teachers.

I had to make pragmatic decision about the timing of teaching practice in relation to the period that I was going for fieldwork. During the time of my research training on the doctoral programme, prospective teachers in the University of Malawi were sent home due to unsettled grievances against their administrators. They had failed to agree on the period for teaching practice for final year education students. This meant that it was unwise to think of conducting a study in the University of Malawi. However, Masambiro College had a fixed teaching practice period. This worked to my advantage because I would finish course work and proceed to empirical data collection without having a major hiatus. It was therefore very convenient to conduct my study at Masambiro College.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed a number of crucial issues as a way of contextualising this study. I have argued that limited research on secondary teacher education and student teachers in Malawi necessitated this study. Teacher education might benefit from studies conducted elsewhere but the need for local research is overwhelming. While studies from other places may offer insight on teacher education in Malawi, that is not a solution to the quest for endogenous knowledge on teacher education. In the chapter, I have also discussed my personal and professional development and how that has shaped the study especially the selection of the research site. I have noted that the findings from this study could help provide alternative designs of teaching practice for more productive experiences among student teachers. In the chapter, I have briefly presented the methodological and theoretical approaches that I had to adopt in the study. These issues are discussed in more details in **Chapter Five** and **Chapter Six**. Furthermore, I have addressed the significance of the study before presenting the country context in relation to education.

In the next chapter, I address the developments within formal education, secondary education and teacher education in Malawi. I also address the recent policy guidelines of secondary school teacher education, challenges of secondary school teaching as well as gender and education in Malawi.

CHAPTER TWO: SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN MALAWI-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out to discuss some of the major developments of secondary school education and secondary school teacher education in Malawi. The chapter addresses the missionary role in education, the major educational policies, and the challenges facing secondary education in Malawi. This is important because it helps to trace the origin of formal education and also to contextualize the status of teacher education and secondary school teaching in Malawi. This chapter also addresses international policy discourse on gender and secondary school education. The role of the chapter is that of offering some background information to the contextualized challenges facing teacher education and secondary school teaching in Malawi. The chapter also helps to locate this study within the broader international discourse with particular reference to gender and secondary teacher education and secondary schooling.

2.1 Education in Malawi: Past and present

Malawi's present formal education system was born out of the works of early missionaries, notably, Robert Laws of the Free Church of Scotland, who in 1875 opened the first school at Cape Maclear in Southern Malawi. The main purpose of the early schools was to teach literacy skills so that local people could read the bible and write. The early schools needed teachers for pastoral work and this led to the provision of teacher training facilities by the same missionaries.

The first centre to be opened for training teachers was the Overton Institute of Livingstonia Mission at Khondowe in 1894. The missionaries bequeathed Livingstonia with a lot of facilities, from educational to medical services. The teacher training mode which was used by the Overton Institute was where students who eventually graduated as teachers came in for a year, and then went out to teach for two years. They came in again for one year, went out again for two years, came back again for a third year and then graduated. The implication of this mode of training was that by the time the teachers graduated they had already done a great deal of practice teaching in the schools. Many other missionaries opened schools and teacher training centres in the same way and for the same purpose as Robert Laws.

In the third decade of the 20th century the British colonial government observed that there were certain weaknesses that affected teachers from the missionary training schools. The government realized that missionaries were not concerned about the quality of the teachers they trained (Banda, 1982). In addition there was a lack of provision for upgrading teachers and no clear teacher roles as those trained as teachers were supposed to be both evangelists and teachers. It was against this background that the colonial government opened Jeans Training Centre in 1929. This centre made tremendous advances in teacher education. The advances included production of trained teacher supervisors who became advisers for local teachers and started a number of school improvements, training teachers' wives to assist their husbands to extend the influence of the schools into homes (Banda, 1982). The colonial government also provided grants to mission training colleges. With these advances notable achievements were made such as a dynamic teacher education curriculum and the discontinuation of vernacular language grade training of teachers (Banda, 1982).

The secondary education was established with the opening of Blantyre Secondary School in 1940. Later in 1961, the department of education announced a policy that meant that priority would be given to the expansion of facilities for secondary education. The statement was followed by the appointment of the Phillips Commission and the education survey team to study the implications of the policy (Banda, 1982). In 1962 the Phillips Commission and education survey team recommended and agreed that there was need to embark on the secondary school expansion and improvements in the training of teachers. In light of the recommendations drawn by a Phillips Commission, the secondary teacher education in Malawi dates back to 1962 when the colonial government began training secondary school teachers at Soche Hill College. Soche Hill College not only addressed teacher demand in the wake of secondary education expansion but also attempted to replace expatriates with locally trained teachers. In 1965, when the University of Malawi was established, Soche Hill College became a constituent college of the University and it continued to operate as an independent college offering diplomas in education until 1973.

Following the restructuring of the University of Malawi, Soche Hill College was merged with Chancellor College at Chirunga campus in Zomba, leading to the establishment of the faculty of education. This has become a major teacher education centre up to now. However, other colleges have also embarked on secondary school teacher education.

2.2 Education policy developments (1995-2012)

There have been a number of major educational policy initiatives that the Government of Malawi has embarked on in the aftermath of the democratic elections of 1994. The major policy initiatives in education are outlined in the PIF (Malawi Government, 2001a). The PIF (2000-2012) document is based on a comprehensive analysis of the education sector in Malawi. The major inspiration of PIF is the alleviation of poverty in Malawi through education. According to the Malawi Government, increased investment in education contributes to economic and social development.

The PIF document in its preamble states:

> Only educated populace can best exploit Malawi's rich natural resources base. Moreover, an educated populace is fully able to participate in a democratic society, is fully aware of its cultural heritage and of the need to further develop its culture, and to participate actively in the African and global communities (Malawi Government, 2001a: vii).

The educational policy objectives for Malawi from 1995 have been:

(a) To increase access to educational opportunities for all Malawians at all levels of the system;

(b) That the education system should not intensify existing inequalities across social groups and regions;

(c) To maintain and improve the quality and relevance of education. This would be done by providing good physical infrastructure, good qualified teachers, and adequate instructional material;

(d) To develop an institutional and financial framework that will sustain Malawian schools and students into the future;

(e) To encourage private sector investment in the development of education (Malawi Government, 2001a).

The first major policy which the government implemented after the general elections in 1994 was the introduction of FPE. FPE was introduced in response to the importance of basic education in one's life. Specifically, FPE responded to international declarations such as Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of education for every child, the Jomtien Conference (1990) on education, the Dakar Convention on education (1991), the Ouagadougou Conference on education (1993). The major call by these conferences was that there should be education for all (EFA) bearing in mind the vital role that education plays in national development. The introduction of FPE has been a major impetus for subsequent

policy initiatives that the government has adopted for primary education, secondary education, teacher education and tertiary education. Having addressed some of the major educational developments and the driving forces behind those developments, my task now moves to assessing educational policy issues that directly relate to this study, thus teacher education policy for secondary school teaching. In this discussion, an attempt is made to link policy issues with lives of teachers who teach in secondary school.

The overall policy of the Malawi government on teacher education is to meet the increased demand for qualified teachers both at primary and secondary school levels. These would be able to manage a variety of student based delivery models (Malawi Government, 2001a). The demand for the provision of open access to primary education, implemented through the FPE policy has led to increased demand for secondary school places and teachers. This has meant that the output of primary school teachers must increase dramatically. The effect of FPE on secondary teacher education called for an urgent action to increase current production quota of secondary teachers through a variety of training modes such as residential, non-residential, distance or a combination of any of the two. It also called for radical reform in the way current teacher education programmes are conducted, starting from selection criteria to a strong reliance on government funding (Malawi Government, 2001a).

While this is a policy for teacher education in terms of increasing output, some strategies that the government has put in place raise a number of problems. One of such strategies is instituting cost sharing system in teacher education. This means that individuals wanting to become teachers have to pay for the teacher education programmes that they may attend. While this sounds an effective and better way of spreading and meeting costs of training, I argue that this may not be the appropriate approach for a nascent education system aiming to attract more young people into teaching. I also argue that there is something missing in the policy document about the teachers in practice in public schools. While the policy talks a lot of teacher education, it does not say much on prospective student teachers during teacher education programme studies. The PIF document looks at this as a challenge and calls for research on teacher education, recruitment problems, retention issues, and reasons for high teacher attrition (Malawi Government, 2001a). This study is, in some way, an attempt at understanding some underlying issues in relation to teacher education, particularly the teaching practice component thereby a direct response to government's call for better understanding of teacher education.

2.3 Challenges of secondary school teaching

It is important to consider the status of secondary education in order to appreciate the need for the good quality of teacher education in Malawi. Secondary school education in Malawi faces a number of challenges. The Malawi Government recognizes that significant policy changes have been made in the past decade, but these were in most cases partial and aimed at redressing problems inherited from the past and rarely sought to address the educational challenges of the future (Malawi Government, 2001a). The challenges are carefully considered here with a view of providing a picture of the realities of secondary school teaching in Malawi.

2.3.1 Introduction of FPE

The Malawi Government and donors are increasingly turning their attention to secondary education and policies are being formulated to create more widely accessible, more relevant, and higher quality secondary education (World Bank, 2000). This is, in part, a response to the successes registered from the inception of FPE. As more pupils are completing primary education, secondary schools are being constructed, such as community day secondary schools (CDSS) and conventional secondary schools to absorb large numbers of pupils completing the primary education cycle since the dawn of FPE.

The demand for increased secondary provision has grown as a consequence of greatly increased primary completion in response to FPE. As school participation rates and retention rates improve, countries such as Malawi are now faced with enormous social demand for wider access to better quality and more relevant secondary education (Malawi Government, 2001b). According to MPRSP (Malawi Government, 2001b), in the first year of FPE, enrolments increased by over 50% from 1.9 million in 1993/4 to about 3.2 million in 1994/5. Net enrolments prior to FPE had been 58% for girls, increasing to 73% by 1996; and 58% also for boys, but only increasing to 68% by 1996 (Malawi Government, 2001b). Gross enrolments increased from 67.9% in 1990/1 to 158.1% in 1999/2000. Male and female gross enrolment rates were comparable in 1999/2000 at 157.9 and 158.3%, respectively (Malawi Government, 2001b). This notable success of FPE had repercussions in secondary education especially with regard to quality of teaching and pupil-teacher ratios (Malawi Government, 2001b).

As a result of the growth of secondary education there is a sharply increased demand for high quality secondary teachers. Projected demand of teachers in Malawi far exceeds projected supply (see **Table 2.1** below). This, combined with severe budget constraints, puts pressure

on the government to seek effective and efficient approaches to recruiting, preparing, supporting, and retaining qualified secondary school teachers (Mtegha, 2004).

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Enrolment	294385	328221	362763	381000	409440	438130	465794	490221	501657	509663	517331	533977	564434
T/P	1:191	1:177	1:163	1:149	1:135	1:121	1:109	1:95	1:81	1:67	1:53	1:40	1:40
We Need	1541	1854	2226	2557	3033	3621	4275	5160	6193	7606	9761	13349	14111
We Have	1097	1541	1854	2226	2557	3033	3621	4273	5160	6193	7606	9761	13349
Attrit 10%	110	154	185	223	256	303	362	427	516	619	761	976	1335
Remain	987	1387	1669	2003	2301	2730	3259	3846	4644	5574	6845	8785	12014
Training Need	554	467	557	554	732	891	1014	1314	1549	2032	2916	4564	2097

Table 2.1: Secondary school teacher demand

Source: Malawi Government (2001b)

Table 2.1 represents the projections of teacher demand in Malawi between 2000 and 2012. According to **Table 2.1**, the enrolment of pupils into secondary school will be increased from around 18% to 30% of primary school leavers by 2012. The teacher–pupil ratio will need to be at 1:40 by the year 2012. The **Table 2.1** envisages a production of at least 2097 graduates by 2012 so that the secondary school sector will have a stock of at least 14,111 teachers (13349) teachers taking into account an attrition rate of 10% per annum, to meet the pupil-teacher ratio of 1:40 (Malawi Government, 2001b). The teacher attrition rate of 10% arises from a number of causes such as teacher resignation, death, teacher transfer to non-teaching posts (see **Table 2.2** on teacher attrition). The high teacher attrition rate in Malawi means that the teaching profession needs to be very aggressive to train and recruit more teachers to cover those who are leaving.

There was a general lack of a solid policy and clear strategic plan to address overwhelming demands due to the rapid expansion of primary and secondary school sub-sectors of education with the introduction of FPE. This in turn increased demand for teachers. The effect of this policy has been poor quality of education as many untrained and under-qualified teachers were recruited to contain the huge pupil enrolments in primary schools (Kadzamira and Rose, 2001).

The other effect of FPE was that government converted MCDEs into community day secondary schools (CDSSs). This 'glorification' of MCDEs into CDSSs had its own repercussions. It led the government to take away what one would call 'better' teachers in primary schools to take up teaching positions in secondary school without appropriate training. Consequently this further weakened both primary and secondary education. In fact,

this left most primary schools with large numbers of under-qualified and unqualified teachers while also transferring under prepared teachers to teach in secondary schools. The effects of FPE were also felt by student teachers in the study in terms of the pupil populations in classes where they had to conduct lessons. The issues around large pupils population have been well covered in the findings of the study (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

2.3.2 Institutional output of teachers

It has been observed that teaching in Malawi is marked by low institutional output of teachers (see **Table 2.1**). This is against the background of increased access to both primary and secondary schools by students following the inception of FPE. The total institutional output of teachers has remained at less than 400 a year (Malawi Government, 2001b). This is the case because university colleges and other colleges that take part in teacher education programmes still cannot produce the required output of teachers due to among others, limited bed space, lack of financial support, less attractive teacher welfare after graduation and the long held public view that teaching is a low profile profession (Malawi Government, 2001b).

The other factor that exacerbated the low output of teachers is that, some colleges that are supposed to participate in teacher education have not been active in developing fully fledged teacher education programmes in their colleges. This is particularly the case for BC, a constituent college of the University of Malawi. It is paradoxical that BC has not been actively involved in teacher education while Malawi's economy is largely agricultural and would therefore need more teachers in agricultural sciences. BC has enrolled only ten students to pursue a bachelor of science in agricultural education in 2007 (see the University of Malawi selection list of 2007).

Currently, large-scale teacher education programmes are offered at Chancellor College and the Polytechnic. There are other colleges which provide teacher education programmes such as Domasi College, Mzuzu University and African Bible College but the number of teachers graduating from these colleges do not yet meet the demand for secondary school teachers.

2.3.3 Expenditure allocation

Since the inception of FPE in 1994, it has become a tradition in Malawi to allocate more financial budget to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) as compared to other key ministries. However, of all the allocation that goes to the MoEST, only 10% is spent on buying essential materials for teaching and learning. Of the total budget, 90% goes

towards paying remuneration for teachers (Malawi Government, 2001b). The result is that the school infrastructure where teachers work or live especially in rural areas is of poor quality and/or inadequate. Many schools do not have adequate desks and teaching and learning materials. In some extreme cases, some pupils have to learn under trees or church buildings at some point of the school term especially when national examinations are in progress.

It has even become harder for the MoEST to spread out money to all the deserving schools recently. This is not surprising because the primary school base has expanded in response to FPE. Even though the local communities have been asked to assume ownership of schools and contribute to their sustenance, this becomes harder in a country where the local communities form the bulk of the people labelled as the 'poorest'. The little money they get is better used for their own sustenance than a contribution to schools. Additionally, the illiteracy rate in rural areas is very high and it is difficult for such people to appreciate the contribution that education might make to their well-being. Nonetheless, the local communities have contributed tremendously through their labour towards brick moulding, building teachers' houses and other activities in their respective primary school and CDSSs. With some financial support, the schools would be able to carry out major activities without problems. The impact of expenditure allocation to secondary school was also felt by student teachers in the study. This was observed from the general lack of resources for teaching and learning for both teachers and pupils. The findings in the study alluded to resource constraints during teaching practice (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

2.3.4 In-service education and training (INSET)

As I showed earlier, Malawi experiences a critical shortage of qualified secondary school teachers. To add to that, most teachers who are currently teaching in the primary and secondary schools hardly attend any INSET to enhance their professionalism and pedagogical growth (Malawi Government, 2001a). This is at the expense of the changes that the school curriculum is undergoing. This lack of training renders teachers inept to cope with the dynamism of school curriculum and the new approaches advocated in it. The result is that the quality of curriculum delivery is compromised.

As pointed out earlier, the introduction of FPE in line with EFA policy led the government to introduce CDSSs. As a result the secondary sub-sector is experiencing critical shortage of qualified secondary school teachers (Malawi Government, 2001). This has been epitomised

by the heavy staffing of CDSSs with primary school teachers who are, by all means, under qualified to teach in secondary schools. The only way to improve the performance of these poorly qualified teachers is through INSET. It therefore becomes a major hurdle when the INSET is rarely available for these teachers.

Currently very few teachers in Malawi undergo any meaningful in-service training and education (INSET) due to inadequate funding towards professional development of teachers. This creates a necessary condition to make initial teacher education more important. In addition, the initial secondary school teacher education has not received a lot of research attention so as to help teacher educators make informed decisions on the improvements needed. This leaves teachers and secondary teaching at the mercy of the old cliché: '*if it ain't broke, don't fix it*'.

2.3.5 Work place conditions

'Teachers are workers; teaching is work; and the school is a workplace (Connell, 1985: 69).
Schools are workplaces and the human resources are the most central aspect to the operation of schools (Weller-Ferris, 1999). There is a growing realisation that good teaching environments and the resources afforded to teachers are central to teachers' effective and efficient teaching in schools (Weller-Ferris, 1999).

The relationship between workplace conditions and decisions to stay in the classroom has been substantiated in the research literature (Brownell *et al.,* 1997; Morvant *et al.,* 1995; Weller-Ferris, 1999). Rosenholtz (1989) suggested that workplace conditions are the design and management of specific tasks within the workplace. She offered three primary organizational conditions which influence commitment to teaching. According to Rosenholtz (1989) the environment must provide teachers with 'psychological rewards, where people gain estimates of their particular worth in a performance-based context' (p. 423). Rosenholtz (ibid) suggested that positive relations with pupils, colleagues, administrators, and parents could fulfill the need for psychic rewards for the majority of teachers. The desire for 'increased task autonomy and discretion' (p. 423) is also essential in a commitment to teach.

The workplace must offer opportunities for teachers to experience professional independence and to have input on instructional decisions that influence the learning of their pupils. The work that is being conducted must be meaningful and it must be 'important to their personal values and beliefs' (Rosenholtz, 1989: 424). In order for teaching to be meaningful, teachers should:

(a) Be provided with opportunities for professional growth;

(b) Be encouraged to demonstrate confidence in their ability to teach pupils; and

(c) Believe that their work positively affects pupils (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The issues which Rosenholtz (ibid) suggested here are also relevant to the proper development of student teachers during teaching practice in secondary schools. Student teachers could benefit from work place conditions which afford them opportunities for collegiality, being able to get support in the school and also being able to feel valued.

The working conditions of teachers in Malawi have generally been perceived as not good. The poor environment in which teachers work is reflected in the lack of desks, lack of teaching and learning materials, large classroom, limited incentives, unclear career path, public negative attitude toward teachers, poor housing for teachers, distance from school for teachers who have to rent houses away from schools and others (Malawi Government, 2001b). These contribute to poor performance of teachers and pupils. As I pointed out earlier, even though the budgetary allocation to education is one of the biggest, only a small percentage of the funding is spent on refurbishment of physical conditions of the schools. In the case of this study, the conditions of secondary schools where student teachers conducted teaching practice were noted in terms of student teachers views about the secondary school settings (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

2.3.6 Teacher attrition

Macdonald (1999) argued that the loss of teachers in the teaching profession is rarely distributed evenly across the teaching force. Attrition has been noted to be highest in geographical locations where living conditions are extremely poor, harsh or expensive (Macdonald, 1999). Attrition rates are also said to be higher in the early years of the teaching career. Teachers early in their careers may have less stable family lives and have less commitment to teaching (Macdonald, 1999). Differential rates of attrition for teachers can also be clustered around specific subjects, with higher attrition for those subjects in demand in other jobs (Macdonald, 1999).

Attrition may also be related to teacher qualifications. The most highly qualified teachers may be the most likely to leave, as they can get alternative employment (Macdonald, 1999). Hedges (2002) reports that, in Ghana, unqualified teachers may have more of a stake in the communities they work with, and hence lower attrition, because they have fewer choices. In Zimbabwe, by contrast, attrition of unqualified teachers was higher than qualified teachers, possibly reflecting the short-term nature of their contracts (World Bank, 1992). In addition, attrition may be increased by a perception of teaching as a path to further education or

teaching as an exit strategy from teaching. Over 80 percent of newly qualified Ghanaian teachers indicated that they expect to move on to further study within five years (Akyeampong and Lewin, 2002). The **Table 2.2** below represents a sample of key factors that contribute to teacher attrition in Malawi.

Based on **Table 2.2** below, even though a large population of teachers transfer within teaching posts, a good number transfer to non-teaching posts. Additionally, some teachers resign from the teaching profession. Teacher loss in Malawi has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. According to the World Bank (2000), teachers in Africa are regularly singled out as being a 'high-risk group' with respect to HIV/AIDS infection. In particular, in the high prevalence countries, it is expected that the epidemic may cut a 'swathe' through the teaching profession. For example, it was reported in 2002 that one in seven teachers in Malawi was likely to die during that year alone (Bennell, 2003).

Geographic Level	Reasons for Leaving								Total
	Transferred to another Teaching post	Transfer to non teaching post	Resigned	Retired	Prolonged Illness	Dismissed	Died	Other	
Central Eastern									
Dowa	215	2	10	15	6	5	33	15	301
Kasungu	267	6	15	16	8	8	28	28	376
Nkhotakota	80	2	4	7	2	1	17	7	120
Ntchisi	95	3	7	1	2	2	13	3	126
Salima	84	2	5	11	2	2	26	3	135
Total	741	15	41	50	20	18	117	56	1058
Central Western									
Dedza	165	7	5	8	4	0	27	9	225
Lilongwe Rural East	193	5	11	18	14	1	30	28	300
Lilongwe Rural West	219	12	12	15	6	11	28	12	315
Lilongwe City	211	2	8	15	7	6	27	13	289
Mchinji	138	4	11	1	5	4	27	14	204
Ntcheu	228	6	8	9	6	4	29	9	299
Total	1154	36	55	66	42	26	168	85	1632
Northern									
Chitipa	90	1	1	8	5	7	19	9	140
Karonga	153	2	3	14	9	8	17	10	216
Likoma	9	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	12
Mzimba North	127	2	9	25	10	10	21	5	209
Mzimba South	145	1	9	26	9	11	11	12	224
Mzuzu City	85	3	4	11	6	2	11	6	128
Nkhata Bay	135	4	9	12	4	7	22	12	205
Rumphi	112	2	5	5	9	4	14	6	157
Total	856	15	40	102	53	49	116	60	1291
Shire Highlands									
Chiradzulu	61	1	1	5	10	8	20	4	110
Mulanje	124	1	8	8	3	11	49	6	210
Phalombe	62	1	2	6	2	3	22	11	109
Thyolo	135	1	14	18	7	21	34	9	239
Total	382	4	25	37	22	43	125	30	668
Southern Eastern									
Balaka	130	0	7	10	6	8	31	7	199
Machinga	180	3	16	4	2	6	18	12	241
Mangochi	151	4	4	6	7	7	24	16	219
Zomba Rural	186	4	4	7	4	4	41	24	274
Zomba Urban	49	2	11	0	1	2	15	1	81
Total	696	13	42	27	20	27	129	60	1014
Southern Western									
Blantyre Rural	130	7	19	10	7	19	44	11	247
Blantyre City	165	7	6	5	1	19	30	9	242
Chikwawa	91	1	6	6	8	5	25	9	151
Mwanza	85	2	3	4	2	0	13	3	112
Nsanje	58	3	7	7	6	1	20	7	109
Total	529	20	41	32	24	44	132	39	861
Grand Total	4358	103	244	314	181	207	787	330	6524

Table 2.2: Teaching staff reasons for leaving schools by district in Malawi

Source: Malawi Government (2004)

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While recent studies have disproved the death of one in seven teachers, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is real and teachers are dying in large number as a result of the infection (Bennell, 2003). Teacher attrition as a result of HIV/AIDS related deaths is higher today than was the case before 1985 when the first HIV/AIDS case was diagnosed in Malawi (World Bank, 2000).

2.3.7 Teaching as an individual enterprise

Collaborative work with peers who are within the school increases teacher's sense of affiliation with the school and their sense of mutual support and responsibility for effectiveness of instruction. This has been praised for promoting a sense of community of practice (Wenger, 1988). Opportunities for collaboration among colleagues, particularly for novice teachers, are important to foster acceptance of teaching standards set by individual schools and to improve opportunities for student learning (Rosenholtz, 1989). This is associated with an increased propensity to carry out more substantial innovations that affect instructions.

However, there are problems of individualism and isolationism in the way teachers carry out their duties in most schools in Malawi. Some literature (e.g. Day and Sim, 1997) noted that one of the most important features of the teachers' professional performance is its individual nature where schools' work organised in this manner does not promote team communication nor co-responsibility for the results. This way of operation forces teachers to find solutions to the problems they face in their teaching and learning activities in private (Day and Sim, 1997). This is a critical issue for student teachers and beginning teachers who might never have been in a real classroom before and may have difficulties finding solutions to problems. For countries like Malawi where novice teachers are rarely inducted in the school system, more problems may arise as a result of this individualistic and isolationist way of teacher operation.

2.4 Gender and secondary school education

> International consensus on education priorities accords an important place to achieving gender justice in the educational sphere. Both Dakar Conference 'education for all' goals and Millennium Development goals emphasize gender parity and gender equality. The former implies achieving equal participation of girls and boys in all forms of education based on their proportion in the relevant age-group and the latter implies ensuring educational equality between boys and girls (Subrahmanian, 2005).

It is important to consider gender as an important aspect of national development. Secondary teacher education in the developing countries should embrace gendered policies. This may help promote gender parity and gender equality in Malawi. The international discourse

suggests the emergence of a new global consensus which stresses the significance of ending worldwide poverty through internationally driven targets in which education plays a key role (Black and White, 2003). A strong case can be made for promoting gender equality and gender parity in secondary teacher education in Malawi on grounds of growth, poverty reduction, equity, and social cohesion. The reason for considering these issues in the current study is to justify the need for proper preparation of secondary school teachers so that they take up teaching positions in secondary schools. In particular, the majority of key participants in this study were female student teachers (see **Chapter Five**).

According to a Malawi Government policy document (Malawi Government, 2001a) there is an important challenge in terms of equity in education and gender-focused initiatives are considered to be effective in the elimination of poverty. In some remote parts of the country, girls' enrolment in primary school is relatively low. Malawi has achieved high levels of primary education coverage as a result of FPE but still has low enrolments at the secondary level and university education (UNESCO, 1999). Gender imbalance is more pronounced at the secondary school level where approximately 39% of secondary school pupils are female, and at the tertiary sub-sector, where approximately 28% of students are female (Malawi Government, 2001a). The situation of women's under-representation in higher education institutions is compounded by their under-representation in science and other professional degree programmes. Malawian girls are also relatively under-represented in vocational training institutions. They are more prone to repetition and dropout than boys and they form the majority of the country's illiterate population (Malawi Government, 2001a).

Investing in secondary teacher education can have a direct impact on the effort to reach some of the MDGs. Increasing the provision of secondary education can boost completion rates in primary education. If a pupil has a realistic opportunity to continue with studies in secondary school, this can increase motivation (and the family's perceived incentives) for graduation from primary school (World Bank, 2005). Lavy (1996) found that in Ghana improving access to secondary education facilities not only improved enrolment at the secondary level but also served as an incentive for primary school completion. If transition rates from primary to secondary education fall, it is likely that primary completion will decline as well and that dropout rates in the final years of primary education might not be easily reduced (Lavy, 1996). This calls for the need to expand access to secondary school teacher education to ensure that pupils' ambitions of undergoing secondary education are fulfilled as a result of the availability of properly trained teachers.

An important private benefit of increased education is its positive impact on personal health. In both developed and developing countries, a strong correlation exists between schooling and good health, whether measured by mortality rates, morbidity rates, or self-reported health status (Cave, 2001; Mahy, 2003). Education has been proven to provide protection against HIV infection (World Bank, 1999). There is convincing evidence that young people in Africa especially females who complete basic education are at reduced risk of HIV/AIDS and this effect is even stronger for those who complete secondary education. A longitudinal study in Uganda found a marked decline in HIV prevalence rates in males and females age 18–29 with secondary to higher-level education but a much smaller decrease among those with lower educational levels (de Walque, 2004).

Secondary school teachers have a general preventive impact by providing girls and boys with skills to critically process information. They equip pupils to make decisions concerning their own lives and to bring about long-term behavioural change (World Bank, 2005). Paradoxically, in the sub-Sahara Africa, secondary school teachers as well as primary school teachers who are regarded as sources of 'social vaccine', are themselves being destroyed by HIV/AIDS, through increased mortality and absenteeism (Bennell, 2003). Ensuring the supply of secondary education to both girls and boys therefore implies a need for special efforts to protect both today's teachers and the young people in secondary school who will be tomorrow's secondary school teachers (World Bank, 2005).

The education of women results in a number of beneficial health impacts for children. Secondary school educated women are more likely than their primary school educated peers to delay marriage and childbearing and have appropriate family planning knowledge, skills and attitudes. Demographic and health surveys in 49 developing countries show that the mortality rate of children under five is highest in households where mothers have no schooling and lowest where mothers have some secondary schooling (Bhatia and Cleland, 1995). Evidence also indicates that relatively high levels of secondary education or above are consistently positively related to most aspects of gender equality, regardless of other conditions. Women are much more likely to be agents of normative and structural change when they have more education (Malhotra *et al.,* 2003). Secondary schooling always has a positive effect on a woman's use of a variety of prenatal and delivery services, as well as postnatal care, and the effect is larger than the effect of lower levels of schooling (Govindasamy, 2000).

It would also be appropriate to assume that secondary school education provides boys with appropriate information regarding sex education and the need to delay marriage. These views make strong cases for promoting secondary teacher education for both genders in Malawi by ensuring that prospective teachers of secondary education are appropriately trained for their teaching roles so that boys and girls are properly taught in schools. In addition to the well-understood benefits to societies and to families of educating women, there is evidence that women's education is a catalyst for reducing gender inequality and so benefits women themselves. According to Malhotra *et al.,* (2003) secondary education enhances women's well-being and gives them a greater voice in household decisions, more autonomy in determining the conditions of their lives, and improved opportunities to participate in community affairs and the labour market.

The importance of secondary teacher education has also been linked to contributions to the intergenerational maintenance and accumulation of human and social capital. Society is becoming more complex and less traditional and secondary education has become integral for building networks of civic engagement that form the core of the collective capabilities of communities to work for the common good (Welsh, 2003). Research by Balatti and Falk (2002) showed that learning as a social activity has a strong influence on the development of shared norms and the value placed on tolerance and understanding within a community. It is also an important determinant of the three key building blocks of social capital (namely, building trust, extending and reconstructing social networks, and reinforcing behaviour and attitudes that influence community participation) (Balatti and Falk, 2002). Secondary education can therefore help both male and female Malawians from diverse ethnic background to tolerate each other especially in matters of political differences. This could prevent occurrence of ethnic hatred and acts of ethnic killing as witnessed in Kenya in the aftermath of the December 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections in which women and children were major victims. The Kenyan presidential and parliamentary elections seemed to have rekindled age-old colonial tribal rivalry. Most of the post-election violence has involved people in rural areas who may be illiterate. Such people may still be too traditional with strong allegiance to their tribe than national allegiance.

Secondary education helps build social capital by raising the likelihood that citizens will participate in democratic institutions and will join community organizations and engage in politics. Studies in the United States and the United Kingdom show that there is strong evidence that secondary education contributes to changes in attitudes and behaviour that enhance interest in politics, voter participation, and civic activity, thus helping promote

active citizenship by both men and women (Dee, 2003; Milligan, *et al.,* 2003). These findings are quite significant for Malawi in the sense that secondary teachers can help nurture the young democratic culture in the aftermath of the first democratic elections of 1994.

There is need therefore for visible and sustained commitment if positive changes in attitudes, policies, and programmes affecting gender equality in primary, secondary and post-secondary education are to take place in Malawi. Commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women through equal access to all levels of education by 2015 is essential for national development especially in the developing world where women do not play significant roles in national development due to their poor access and retention in primary and secondary education. In Malawi, the commitment towards gender equality is evident in the creation of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Welfare. This ministry is responsible for ensuring that appropriate pressure is mounted to promote the welfare of women and children in various ways. The ministry works hand in hand with other ministries and departments such as the MoEST to ensure that gender equity is reflected in educational policies being implemented in the country.

The synergy between the Ministry of Gender and Children's Welfare and other ministries has yielded a number of policy changes. At university level, the push for gender equality can be evident in a number of policy decisions that have been adopted. The University of Malawi has embarked on granting scholarships to both female and male students to ensure that students selected to university complete their studies. In addition, the university is working towards a policy of ensuring that 40% of students selected to university every year are female.

At Bunda College, the Norwegian Government through their development arm, NORAD, constructed a 120 bed hostel in 2001 to ensure that the college increases the enrolment of female students. In addition, Press Trust Corporation has donated funds to Bunda College for the construction of an 80 bed hostel for female students who enrol for university education on non-residential basis. The presence of more women in the tertiary education system might allow space for the creation of educational alternatives that may change the system and adapt it to women and their lives. Equally, tertiary education is also relevant to EFA goals as a component of the gender equality goal and as an important provider of secondary teachers and administrators (UNESCO, 2007).

In secondary and primary school levels, the Government changed its policy to permit young mothers to re-enter school after giving birth. Implementation of the policy, however, has

been problematic due to resistance from school personnel who are concerned that this policy encourages promiscuity, and that young mothers become a bad influence on other girls in school (Semu, 2003). Legislation against the abuse of girls is another measure of achieving gender parity in post-secondary, secondary and primary education levels (Oxfam, 2005).

It has been noted that physical and psychological violence perpetuated by teachers and by pupils themselves are still around in many schools (UNESCO, 2007). Boys are more likely to experience frequent and severe corporal punishment in countries where corporal punishment is still used such as Malawi. On the other hand, girls are more likely to be affected by sexual violence and harassment, often resulting in low self-esteem and early dropout (UNESCO, 2007). A comparative study conducted in Malawi, Ghana and Zimbabwe found that many girls reported aggressive sexual advances by male teachers (UNESCO, 2007). Dunne and Leach (2005) reported in their study of a case in Botswana where a male teacher in a rural high performing school coerced female pupils to accept his "sexual" advances. Even though there was only a single reported case in Dunne and Leach's study, similar incidents may be prevalent in schools but some female pupils may be afraid to report such incidents in fear of reprisals from teachers. This may be the case where the perpetrator is not only a school teacher but also a school administrator. This might affect girls' attendance and retention in both primary and secondary schools.

According to Oxfam (2005) even though legal and policy commitments may be in place, their implementation and enforcement is often weak and well-intentioned policies become diluted due to difficulties in enforcing legislations. The other problem with the enforcement of such legislations or policies may be attributed to lack of civic education among the communities who are supposed to benefit from such policies. This means that in practice, legal and policy commitments are never enough to ensure girls' access to education. There is need for commitment by authorities to ensure that legislation and codes of conduct are properly implemented and enforced. Legal commitment must also be supported by political commitment (Oxfam, 2005).

Further, securing sustained commitment to gender equality in the sub-Sahara Africa is difficult, especially when the changes required are contrary to socio-cultural norms. Countries that have been most successful in making rapid progress towards gender parity and equality have been those in which there is a strong and broadly supported ideology of social inclusion (Oxfam, 2005). This has been the case in several countries emerging from socio-political upheavals, such as post-revolution Mozambique and post-genocide Rwanda. The

experiences of these countries suggest that where a process of more general transformation is underway, coinciding with a drive for equality, policy makers have an opportunity to accelerate progress towards gender equality in education (Oxfam, 2005).

Others measures may be needed to increase the contribution of female secondary school teachers to the education system (Croft, 2000). Increasing women's contribution is particularly important not only for the teachers themselves, but also because it is expected that they will have a role in breaking into the cycle of female educational underachievement, and thus helping achieve gender equality in education. Within the drive to provide EFA there are calls to improve access, quality and equity in primary and secondary education for both boys and girls. Female teachers and principals are critical to the expansion and improvement of secondary education systems. Female teachers in leadership positions within schools provide good role models for female pupils and may encourage pupil retention. Women in position of authority do not only act as role models, but also are in a position to change the priorities and practices of government. In appreciation of the role of women in authority in Africa, a Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) was set up in 1992 as an organizational network 'capturing the synergy of ideas, the influence and the power of women leaders working to promote the best interests of girls' education'(Hyde and Miske, 2000).

However, it would appear that leadership in secondary schools in Malawi is presently dominated by males. This is the case because the recruitment into secondary school teacher education programmes is based on academic merit. This is evident during the selection of students to various programmes in the University of Malawi. A candidate is expected to score above 60% in the university entrance examinations apart from scoring an aggregate of 36 points on MSCE to be selected for university education. However, this treatment of men and women as equals at the entry level of secondary teacher education programmes may be viewed as unjust based on the fact that men and women do not necessarily have equal access to primary and secondary education through which they are judged to enter secondary school teacher education (Croft, 2000). In the context of FPE, studies show that inadequate clothing and lack of money to buy school supplies are an important reason for non-enrolment of girls (Kadzamira and Chibwana, 2000; Burchfield and Kadzamira, 1996). The Government has not always provided exercise books and writing materials to pupils. Equally, despite the phasing out of school fees, schools may request money from pupils in form of general purpose funds (GPF) for various school activities and boys may be able to raise that money

through casual labour unlike girls who perform most of the unpaid domestic chores in their household.

In summary, I have addressed international policy initiatives and practical issues of gender and secondary education in relation to Malawi. I have explored the importance of secondary school education for national development and the call for ensuring that female and male pupils benefit from secondary education. This provides some justification for proper and expanded secondary school teacher education. Secondary school teachers play an important role in national growth, poverty reduction, gender equality and social cohesion. Secondary school education features highly in the attainment of EFA and MDGs. Even though policies and legislations are in place, there are hurdles in Malawi and other sub-Sahara Africa countries to ensure equal access and retention of girls in secondary education. Female secondary school teachers have a crucial role to play in minimizing the imbalance between genders at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. A study which tries to understand female and male student teachers' experiences of teaching practice may be necessary in ensuring that secondary school teachers are effective in their contribution to national development.

2.5 Conclusion

It can be seen from the discussion in this chapter that the development of education in Malawi can be traced from the work of the missionaries. Secondary education in Malawi started in the 1940s and this necessitated the training of secondary school teachers. While in its early years, secondary teachers were mostly of European origins. The training of local teachers started in the 1960s. There have been major policy decisions that the government has taken to improve the quality of secondary education in Malawi. However, there are many issues which still confront secondary school teaching in Malawi. Some of the challenges discussed in the chapter relate to secondary teacher education. Gendered secondary school teacher education plays an important role in national growth, poverty reduction, gender equality and social cohesion. Secondary school teacher education therefore features highly in the attainment of international policy initiatives of EFA and MDGs.

In the next chapter, I address specific issues on teacher education and student teachers from international literature.

CHAPTER THREE: INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING PRACTICE-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.0 Introduction

This study aims to explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in Malawi. As noted earlier, the topic of teaching practice has not received much research attention in Malawi. It is important to explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice along with understanding the factors which threaten to undermine initial teacher education. It is essential for those involved in initial teacher education (ITE) to examine ways in which pre-service teachers can be helped both to articulate their own image of self as teacher, as well as to understand the contextual factors which have an impact on professional development in school settings. In this chapter, I address some of the issues of prospective teachers' perceptions about teaching as well as various issues surrounding teaching practice as a component of teacher education. In addition, I offer a discussion of mentoring and learner-centred education in initial teacher education. It is necessary to mention that most of the literature I have reviewed in this chapter is from the developed world due to a lack of relevant literature from the sub-Sahara Africa. There are implications for a reliance on literature from other parts of the world in terms of relevance and applicability. However, I can justify my reliance on the international literature on grounds that the issues I address may be generic to initial teacher education.

3.1 Perceptions around teacher education and teaching

The need for considering issues around perceptions of prospective teachers about teacher education and teaching in this study was overwhelming. To start with, many governments around the world are striving to improve the standards and quality of education at all levels. For Malawi, the need to improve the provision of education has been manifested in various policy directions such as FPE and expansion of teacher education institutions. However, all efforts towards improved standards of education would be meaningless if due attention was not paid to the values that individuals (who become teachers) hold of teacher education and the teaching profession.

Individuals who enroll on teacher education programmes, such as the ones who participated in this study, hold personal views of teaching and teacher education. The views they hold are vital for governments and teacher educators in understanding some of the crucial issues that

are at stake within teacher education and the overall standards of education. These views are also important in understanding matters around teacher retention and attrition (see **Chapter Two**). An insight into student teachers' perceptions can offer teacher educators and governments a forum to ask better questions about issues which are regarded central to the professional lives of teachers as this could help curb teacher attrition and promote teacher recruitment and retention.

The international literature on recruitment and retention of student teachers and qualified teachers provide panoply of issues. In this study, I considered views of prospective teachers and teachers from a number of international geographical locations. In South Africa, Chuene *et al.,* (1999) investigated the perceptions of teachers and new mathematics teachers using qualitative analysis of semi-structured interview data. The findings in the study isolated a number of factors which had prompted the study participants to choose teaching. The factors were ranked and it would appear that many individuals chose teaching for extrinsic reasons, followed by altruistic, then intrinsic and lastly, job-related reasons (Chuene, *et al.*, 1999). The findings were interesting in the sense that most people chose teaching for external reasons which were not essential part of teaching. It would be surprising to see most of this group commit their professional lives to teaching on long-term basis. It would require a great deal of *re-identification* among this group of people to change their perceptions. The fact that this study took place in South Africa is important for my study because Malawi is not far from South Africa geographically. It would be interesting to see how the factors which influenced teachers in South Africa were also relevant for Malawian teachers.

I also considered studies from Slovenia, America and Caribbean. In Slovenia, Kyriacou and Kobori (1998) analyzed questionnaire data collected from student teachers of English. In the study, Kyriacou and Kobori (ibid) established that 'wanting to help children to succeed' and 'enjoyment of the subject' were the two most primary factors which attracted student teachers to the teaching profession. The two factors related to altruistic and intrinsic values of teaching respectively. Compared to the findings in the South Africa study, it can be argued that student teachers in Slovenia held teaching as the central source of motivation for them. In America, Young (1995) found that student teachers wanted to be teachers if they could 'derive expected satisfaction from working with children'. In addition, a study of first year teachers in the Caribbean found that altruistic reasons were significant for choosing a career in teaching (Brown, 1992). In all the three studies, altruistic motives seem to be central reasons for people to choose the teaching profession.

A large-scale survey conducted in United Kingdom by the General Teaching Council (2003) also provided interesting findings around teachers' perceptions of teaching. In the study, there were three key factors which motivated teachers to enter initial teacher education courses. The three motivating factors were; working with young people; a sense of personal achievement; the stimulating nature of the teachers' role (General Teaching Council, 2003). However, this study has been criticized for the low response rate to the postal questionnaire which was used. Nevertheless, the study provides a picture of some of the key factors guiding the perceptions of teachers about teaching in United Kingdom. On the other hand, a small-scale study of Science and History teachers in the United Kingdom offered a different way of looking at views of teachers about teaching (Jenkins, 1998). The study found that the decision to become a teacher was based on unpredictable and conditional factors rather than a sense of vocation or long-term commitment to the teaching profession (Jenkins, 1998). These findings were significant because they suggest that reasons for a joining teacher education and teaching can change from time to time depending on circumstances of individuals.

In terms of gender perspective, it would appear that teaching has long attracted substantial numbers of women at primary school levels and at secondary level the balance between men and women is almost reached in some countries (Hugo, 2001). However, in developing countries such as those in the sub-Sahara Africa, secondary school teaching is mostly done by males. This could be attributed to the merit-based entry requirement in university teacher education programmes (see Croft, 2000). In Australia, women made up 'two thirds of all teachers compared with 43.6 per cent of the total workforce' (Hugo, 2001: 134). The "feminisation of teaching" as a career in Australia coincided with a public perception that teaching is low in status, not well paid and is essentially work more suited to women (Hugo, 2001).

In the case of the UK, Johnston *et al.,* (1999) investigating the choice of primary teaching by males and females indicated that the males who chose primary teaching did so 'despite a number of negative factors towards males proposing to enter primary teaching' (p. 62). This suggests that teacher education institutions face some difficulties attracting sufficient numbers of eligible males into primary school teacher education. As a consequence primary schools may experience serious problems in recruiting male teachers and thus providing a gender imbalance of teachers working with children in primary classrooms (Richardson and Watt, 2005). The shortage of suitably qualified teachers promises to worsen unless primary school teaching as a career can be made attractive to more male teachers. In the same vein, secondary school teaching in the sub-Sahara Africa as a career needs to be opened up to more

females to provide a gender balance of teachers working with children. As I noted in the previous chapter, there are many gains to be accrued from a situation where there is gender parity in the secondary school teaching force.

In summary, research indicates that there are a variety of reasons for people to enroll on teacher education courses and teaching as well as their general perceptions of teaching. The present study, therefore, builds on the findings from various parts of the world in gaining an insight on the perceptions of prospective teachers to join teacher education and the teaching profession in Malawi (see **Chapter Seven**). The literature suggests that there are many factors which pre-service teachers have used for enrolling on teacher education courses or committing their lives to teaching. The factors for joining teaching in other parts of the world have ranged from extrinsic, altruistic, intrinsic and job-related reasons. The literature also shows that there were three other specific factors which motivated teachers to enter initial teacher education courses and these were; working with young people; a sense of personal achievement; the stimulating nature of the teachers' role. The other reasons for joining teaching were based on unpredictable and conditional factors rather than a sense of vocation or long-term commitment to the teaching profession.

As pointed out earlier, an insight into student teachers' perceptions can offer teacher educators and governments a forum to ask better questions about issues which are regarded central to the professional lives of teachers as this would help curb teacher attrition and promote teacher recruitment and retention. It has been shown in the discussion that the primary school teaching force tends to attract more females leading to the feminization of teaching. However, in the sub-Sahara Africa, the difficulties that females face in school prevent some of them from entering university teacher education. Based on the literature, this study also sought the perceptions of student teachers regarding teaching. However, this study did not take a gender perspective in understanding reasons for people to enter secondary school teaching. Nevertheless, it would be fascinating to subject the findings in the study to a gender perspective to gain additional understanding on how female and male student teachers who participated in the study identified their motivation for joining secondary school teaching.

3.2 Initial experiences and beliefs of student/novice teachers

> Unlike many other professionals (e.g. nurses or lawyers), the first time teacher is expected to assume full professional responsibility from the start of their professional lives (Goodman, 1987; Lortie, 1975).

There is a general agreement that the first year of teaching is often marked by frustration, anxiety, anger, withdrawal where people attempt to integrate their idealistic assumptions about teaching with classroom realities (Dow, 1979; Fullan, 1982; Lacey, 1977; William, 1986). In some cases, student and novice teachers have to develop a role identity that may or may not fit with previous beliefs (Tardif, 1984). As a result first time teaching is considered to be very critical to teachers' subsequent practice and to their longevity in the teaching profession (Lortie, 1975; Ryan, 1986; Rust, 1994). Fuller (1969) and Katz (1972) consider the first year of teaching as the 'survival stage' in teacher development. According to Olson and Osborne (1991) this situation often means 'sink or swim' for the new teacher depending on how they were prepared for teaching in college and how they experienced teaching practice. Some novice teachers may succeed while others may struggle in their first teaching appointments. Rust (1994) points out that those novice teachers often start teaching without a holistic sense about learning, the classroom, and life in schools and the holistic sense about learning, the classroom and life in schools form the hallmark of thinking among competent teachers (Reynolds, 1992).

Goodman (1987) found that student/novice teachers may not understand the socially constructed nature of school life. This may be partly due to the short period that they may be attached in schools during teaching practice. The short period of attachment may mean that they may not be fully inculcated into socio-cultural practices of the school systems. However, the sociological contingencies within specific schools can also have strong impact on new teachers (Blakey *et al.,* 1989; Goodman, 1987; Zeichner, 1996). Regardless of context, it is most important and essential that student/novice teachers feel accepted both personally and professionally by the school system (Lacey, 1977). Janssens (1987) and Goodman (1987) found that many novice teachers are more concerned about their sense of self and the tasks at hand than about their pupils. They exert most of their efforts towards survival at the expense of understanding other aspects of teaching and learning. While student and novice teachers may unconsciously assimilate what teaching may be (Lortie, 1975; Ryan *et al.,* 1980), they may have many misconceptions about the realities of teaching. They may find their tasks harder and more rigorous to undertake (Lortie, 1975; Odell, 1988; Ryan *et al.,* 1980). This may be worrying for teacher educators as it may indicate that student teachers sometimes start teaching before they are fully prepared for teaching.

Some writers have pointed to the 'shattering' of images at this stage in teachers' careers as the cause of much disillusionment (Cole and Knowles, 1993; Lortie, 1975). For example, student teachers may hold a clear or strong image of self as a teacher and can find their image

compromised or destroyed by the norms of the particular institution in which they teach. On the other hand, others may demonstrate great role ambiguity, being unaware of and often uncertain about their image of self as teachers (Cole and Knowles, 1993). Research studies have documented the phenomenon of 'reality shock' which student/novice teachers face (Korthagen *et al.,* 2006). The student/novice teachers are also exposed to a 'washing out' effect of insights gained during teacher education and this raises doubt on the impact of teacher education on teacher practice. Wideen *et al.,* (1998) concluded that the transfer from theory presented during teacher education to practice in schools is often little and teacher education practices are often counterproductive to teacher learning. This also questions the extent to which approaches such as learner-centred education which is currently being promoted in teacher education in many parts of the world at the moment can be used in practice in schools. It also questions the nature of relationships that may be built between student teachers and school teachers in teacher education programmes where mentors or 'cooperating teachers' are used (see **Section 3.3.1** and **Section 3.3.2** for detailed discussions of mentoring and learner-centred education respectively).

Some student/novice teachers tend to enter teaching concerned about how to organize instructional environments and how to establish general management routines (Ball and Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Veenman, 1984). Ryan (1986) observed that student and novice teachers tend to focus on what has been called the 'front stage' behaviour. This is said to be the behaviour that is obvious and well-known to anyone else who has spent time in classrooms as a pupil observing teachers. It has also been stated that student and novice teachers lack some useful understanding of the contexts in which they would work and this may reflect their inaccurate understanding of teaching (Bullough *et al.,* 1989). In a sense these student and novice teachers enter schools 'operating on the basis of a radically simplified conception' of teaching (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1989: 39).

Sabar (2004) likened student/novice teachers in their initial school experiences in a new school system to 'strangers'. They are viewed as 'strangers' on the basis that they come from one normative system-teacher education college-with clear set of norms of behaviour, and try to enter another-the school-whose norms may be unfamiliar and different from theirs (Sabar, 2004). Further, the cultural difference between the teacher education college and the schools, and the inconsistency between the student teacher's views of knowledge in a school environment increase the feeling of strangeness. Conway (2001) noted that the difference between student/novice teachers' expectations and the school reality is a major source of

turmoil. This affects the processes of desocialisation and resocialisation that student/novice teachers undergo in their initial school placement (Sabar, 2004).

In this section I have looked at the vulnerability of student/novice teachers with respect to experiencing potential difficulties in their initial teaching placements. I propose the need to identify early perceptions of student/novice teacher's challenges and teacher role beliefs relative to the constraints in order to support student teachers' subsequent development (Haritos, 2004). Mayer and Goldsberry (1993) argued for the importance of student/novice teachers having productive tensions. The productive tensions ensure that student teachers resolve them well for their growth towards becoming effective teachers. By grappling with productive tensions student teachers can begin to interrogate their competing theories of teaching and learning (Copeland and D'Emidio-Caston, 1996; LaBoskey, 1993; Tann, 1993; Valli, 1992). This study attempts to explore the context-based experiences of student teachers during teaching practice within an activity theory framework. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner (2000) who noted that development must be examined in context and is therefore dependent upon the developing individual (known as the subject in activity theory parlance) as well as the environment (known as activity system in activity theory) in which development is taking practice.

3.3 Issues in initial teacher education

According to Korthagen *et al.,* (2006) traditional approaches to teacher education are increasingly critiqued for their limited relationship to student teachers' needs and for their little impact on practice. Other critiques of teaching quality consistently point a finger at teacher education (Gore *et al.,* 2004). This may imply that to improve teacher quality, there is need to improve teacher education. Gore *et al.,* (2004) noted that teacher educators recognize all kinds of peripheral factors which weaken their efforts to improve teacher education such as poor funding, large class sizes and the socializing effects of school cultures. However, they also accept that there are internal weaknesses within their programme. There have been general views that there is need for a radical reform and effective pedagogy of teacher education in which theory and practice are properly linked for effective impact on practice (Korthagen *et al.,* 2006).

There have been various attempts to restructure teacher education but there is no coherent body of knowledge which exists about the central principles underlying teacher education. Lemke (2001) showed that there are few teacher education programmes which carry out systematic research and evaluation to find out the extent to which teachers from their

programmes are prepared to teach all pupils. Morais *et al.,* (2005) also showed that many studies on initial teacher education and teachers' professional development do not have a consistent framework of reference. Unfortunately, most of the issues which affect student teachers in their years of practice have to do with the nature and form of teacher education.

Research on teacher education has shown a disjuncture between the values and practices in teacher education and the ultimate values and practices adopted by teachers during their initial teaching. Studies of teacher education programmes (Borko and Eisenhart, 1992; Kennedy, 1998; Smagorinsky and Whiting, 1995) suggest that in many programmes, pre-service teachers are exposed to textbooks and methods that follow an agenda that includes instruction that is experiential, learner-centred, activity-oriented, interconnected, constructivist and reflective practice. On the other hand, observational studies of schools show that the practice of teaching in schools remains much as it has always been, thus, content-oriented, teacher-centred, authoritarian, mimetic, and recitative (Applebee, 1981; Cuban, 1993; Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984). Korthagen *et al.,* (2006) noted that new conceptions of learning and teaching such as constructivist views and new insights into the nature of knowledge (such as situated knowledge) have developed and these developments are opposed to the traditional practices in teacher education. These incongruities have been the source of vexation for teacher educators and student teachers (Grossman *et al.,* 1997; Wideen *et. al.*, 1998). It has been suggested that to change educational practices, it is necessary to break the circle of traditionally trained teachers who teach in a traditional manner and this represents a major challenge for teacher education (Korthagen *et al.,* 2006).

Some studies have suggested that student teachers feel that their education course work is too theoretical and that teaching practice provides the greatest learning (Fagan and Laine, 1980). Some researchers (e.g. Borko and Eisenhart, 1992; Ritchie and Wilson, 1993) have argued that student teachers learn progressive pedagogies in their pre-service programmes but the social environment of schools in which they teach support an ethic more geared toward content coverage and control, thus overcoming the value placed on pupil-centred pedagogy in teacher education programme. Other authors (e.g. Zeichner and Tabachnik, 1981) argue that pre-service teachers never adopt the values and practices promoted in teacher colleges to begin with, thus questioning the assumption that pre-service teachers accept the values of teacher education programmes only to abandon them in the school culture (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). Teacher education is also alleged to be guilty of 'dumbing down' the work of teaching (Weinstein, 1987). Good (1983) argued that teacher education courses and textbooks convey the notion that teaching is not problematic if certain methods are applied, and generally avoid

discussions of what to do when faced with failure. In addition, student teachers may often be encouraged to find their 'own personal teaching style' or to discover the instructional and managerial strategies that feel right to them (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1985).

The issues discussed in this section are important and may offer a lot of challenges to student teachers who do not get appropriate support from teachers in schools where they may be placed for teaching practice. It is important for student teachers to access some support within school and college systems to minimize the impact of the conflicts within teacher education and school systems. One notable component for providing professional support is through mentoring.

3.3.1 Mentoring

> The high resignation rate for first year teachers is related to lack of effective mentoring, difficult work settings, lack of resources, and isolation from other adults, ill-defined expectations, value performance standards, and inconsistent assessment by poorly trained evaluators (California Commission of Teacher Credentialing, 1992).

Mentoring is considered to be one of the most effective ways of supporting student teachers and novice teachers in initial school experiences. Mentoring is associated with a wide range of benefits in various professional disciplines. Mentoring is popular in medicine, social services, law, city management, industry, the military, banking, sports and performing arts (Strong and Baron, 2004), among others. Mentoring has been increasingly acknowledged and used in training of new teachers in school-based practice in the last decades (Hobson, 2002). It is one of the major sources of professional learning for student teachers during initial teacher education which is currently receiving much attention in developed countries.

Colley (2002) studied the literature about mentoring and found that the use of mentoring occupied a positive policy stance. She noted that mentoring has become an integral component of initial teacher education in a number of mainly western capitalist countries, and in a wide range of fields. Mentoring is being explored as a potential mode of professional development, as an avenue for improving practice, as a strategy for retaining teachers, and as a catalyst for social change in schools (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004; Whitaker, 2003). Mentoring conveys certain assumptions about the teacher's role in the production and use of knowledge about teaching. As a mentor, the teacher is expected to transform their knowledge of practice and guide a less-skilled student teacher. This can be a particularly complex work in this era of paradigmatic shift in which knowledge is situated in the individual (Katz and Bay, 2007).

In a mentoring scheme the responsibility for the professional development of a student teacher is taken on by an experienced teacher, called a mentor. Mentors are required to provide close support to student teachers in lesson preparation, pupil learning needs and abilities diagnoses, classroom instructional processes, conferences and reflection. The mentor is also responsible for inducting student teachers into the school community and to take up responsibilities as normal school teachers. Lam and Fung (2001) suggested that mentors ought to be competent in subject knowledge and pedagogy, should be available, be approachable, have tact and empathy, should not be too directive, should be good listeners, and should give constructive criticism and guidance.

Kram (1995) highlighted the psychosocial functions of a mentor which include counselling, friendship and acceptance-and-confirmation. School-based mentors are viewed as 'facilitators' whose task is to provide an affective climate in which an exploration can be carried out of what underlies classroom behaviour in terms of student teachers' personal beliefs and attitudes. It is assumed that as long as mentors create the appropriate conditions, student teachers will be ready and willing to participate in a voyage of professional learning exploration (Kullman, 1998).

Lam and Fung (2001) noted that cooperating teachers who are regarded as good mentors should:

(a) Help student teachers to take responsibility for their own teaching experiences;

(b) Facilitate student teachers' learning from each other;

(c) Leave the initiative with the student teacher;

(d) Encourage risk taking and expectations;

(e) Encourage student teachers to see the world as less straightforward;

(f) Allow experimentation in the classroom and the student teacher to follow their own interests, where the mentor is not over-prescriptive.

The views of the mentor functions above appear to be in line with an 'educative practicum' mentoring model (Zeichner, 1996). An 'educative practicum' regards teaching as a complex activity where student teachers need to develop capacity in making intelligent decisions to handle ambiguous and challenging situations. In an 'educative practicum model' of mentoring, student teachers need to engage in intelligent teaching, they need to experiment and to develop novel ways of teaching, they need to make and test hypotheses about classrooms and learning (Zeichner, 1996).

Within this mentoring model, education theories learned in college are not supposed to be applied straightforwardly to complex, ambiguous and dynamic educational situations (Zeichner, 1996). Student teachers have to work with mentors to engage in intelligent teaching and intelligent teaching implies the interpretation of unique situations through exploration and investigation, reflection, judgement, deliberation and decisions (Zeichner, 1996). Feiman-Nemser (2001) recommends 'educative mentoring' which has two dimensions: emotional support, providing a comfortable relationship and environment for the new teacher to develop; and professional support based on a principled understanding of student teachers and how they learn.

The other model of mentoring proposes a spectrum of required skills with overlap. These functions are:

> (a) Guiding/leading/advising/supporting;
>
> (b) Coaching/educating/enabling;
>
> (c) Organising/managing;
>
> (d) Counselling/interpersonal (Harrison *et al.,* 2005).

The functions outlined above seem to relate to an 'apprenticeship model' of mentoring. However, initial teacher education does not appear as apprenticeship, a kind of unquestioning imitation of the expert by the novice. The student teachers' imitation and direct modelling is damaging to the development of the teaching profession (Harrison, *et al.,* 2005). Criticisms of the apprenticeship model also revolve around claims that it fails to give recognition to the existing skills and knowledge of the student teacher; it encourages deference to experience regardless of the quality of experience and it encourages student teachers to conform to existing school practices whilst prohibiting the development of new approaches and regeneration of the profession (Rippon and Martin, 2006; Tickle, 2000).

The term 'cooperating teacher' when used to mean a mentor has been described as undesirable in some settings (Awaya *et al.,* 2003). It has been argued that the term assumes that student teachers' placements in schools is often made arbitrarily based on considerations such as teaching specialization and availability of a suitable cooperating teacher at a school (Awaya *et al.,* 2003). It implies the absence of appropriate criteria for matching student teachers with teachers and suggests, instead, that the school teacher is merely cooperating with the teacher education college and its requirements (Awaya *et al.,* 2003). It is interesting to note that the term 'cooperating teacher' is popularly used in initial teacher education

programmes in Malawi. For example, the initial teacher education programme at the University of Malawi uses the term 'cooperating teacher' to mean a school teacher who is supposed to work or assist student teacher during teaching practice. The term was previously used at Masambiro College until 'cooperating teachers' were phased out (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

The relationship between a mentor and a student teacher should transform into emerging colleagueship (Spindler and Biott, 2000). This can be achieved by allowing the mentee to have an independent identity within the school and amongst other colleagues. Spindler and Biott (2000) describe successful examples of new student teacher mentoring that include the transition from a relationship of support and development to one which allows the student or novice teacher to contribute to a team, taking on specific responsibilities in a whole school setting and earning their identity. The mentor should be able to transcend the dominant practices of the school system and recognise good teaching in all its shapes and forms and should have enough confidence to allow the student teachers certain freedoms to evolve their own style and practices (Crasborn *et al.,* 2007).

A study (Hobson, 2003) found 'that the benefits and costs of mentoring experienced by participants in one field will not necessarily be the same as those experienced in another, especially since the nature of the mentoring strategies employed differs to take account of differences in context' (p. 5). There is also research evidence that the culture inherent in a teacher education programme may also affect the content of mentor/mentee conversation (Wang *et al.,* 2003). This may be quite important for initial teacher education in Malawi, where culture tends to have a significant role in the relationship between people in authority and those on professional courses. Feiman-Nemser (1996) draws attention to some vagueness or lack of purpose in some mentoring programmes.

Mentors also tend to have both a development and a judgmental role (Kullman, 1998). The developmental role entails assisting in the student teacher's overall professional learning and development, and includes helping to plan the teaching the student teacher is to do at the school, and providing feedback after observation of lessons which are not assessed. The judgmental role, on the other hand, entails having sole responsibility for the overall assessment of a student teacher's teaching by means of a grading (Kullman, 1998). If student teachers feel that the mentor's role is solely judgmental there can be various consequences: student teachers may be afraid to enter into a constructive dialogue with mentors; they may be disinclined to express worries and concerns, to identify what they perceive as weaknesses

and to ask mentors for guidance to help them develop strategies to remedy such weaknesses; student teachers may concentrate on what they perceive to be their strengths throughout their teaching practice and avoid lesson types and activities which they feel less confident about (Awaya *et al.,* 2003). This may have affects on their perceptions of mentors and how they develop in school settings.

Research by Evertson and Smithey (2001) showed that trained mentors demonstrated better conferencing skills, including more awareness of student teachers' needs. They found that trained mentors guided their mentees more to use self-inquiry or self-discovery in reflecting on a lesson as opposed to evaluating or giving advice for improvement. Trained mentors also used more active listening skills as opposed to a passive listening and elicited more reflection through probing or using follow-up questions (Everton and Smithey, 2001). Timperley (2001) concluded that after training, mentors were able to improve the quality of their dialogues with their student teachers.

Research by Harrison *et al.,* (2005) illustrated that mentor training that focuses on the processes concerned with the types of questioning by the mentor which enables the mentee to begin to open themselves up for scrutiny, can begin to create different ways of working. The mentee is then able to become autonomous in analysing situations arising in practice, and also in thinking of alternative ways of dealing with them. Edwards and Green (1999) concluded in a study that 'cognitive coaching' training can stimulate growth in the supervisory skills. However, not all mentors showed growth in their skills and neither did all the student teachers show growth in their level of reflection. This suggests that not all participants experience the same effects from mentoring training. This may be caused by the fact that the training content and approach is often the same for all participants, while their needs and skill level may possibly be different. There is also a potential influence of personal characteristics of mentors and student teachers in their different levels of growth (Holton and Baldwin, 2000).

An important aspect of an initial teacher education where mentoring is used is a collaborative partnership between schools and colleges of teacher education. Partnership is now the orthodoxy in terms of describing the appropriate relationship between schools and universities in initial teacher education (ITE) in United Kingdom. According to Wilson (2004) partnership models of training can help shift perspectives through mutual engagement in the exploration of possibilities. Working within a partnership has the potential, at the conscious level, for the student or beginning teachers to copy good practices and avoid bad

practices (Wilson, 2004). At a more subtle level, too, exposure to the unspoken classroom and school culture may shape student or beginning teachers' beliefs and practices (Wilson, 2004). In this case, mentoring requires that schools and colleges are linked so that school teachers understand their mentoring roles within initial teacher education when student teachers are placed in their schools. The partnership model is also important because it spells out the type of training that school teachers are supposed to undergo to be effective mentors of student teachers. Graham (2006) noted that in England, schools involved in training teachers, as sites of guided clinical practice, have assumed more responsibility for the pre-service training of teachers. In the England scenario, the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) manages all courses of teacher education by regulating the curriculum as well as the collaboration between teacher education providers, designed training schools and mentors for the teacher education (Furlong, 2002).

In summary, the discussion based on the literature in this section shows that most programmes of initial teacher education in the developed world are relying on mentors to help the professional learning of student teachers during school-based teacher education. In Malawi, the conceptualisation of mentoring does not appear to adhere to how mentoring is used in the developed world. The benefits of mentoring student teachers are manifold and even though the role of 'cooperating teacher' was phased out at the research site of the current study (Masambiro College), the discussion in the section suggests that 'cooperating teachers' can play a significant role in initial teacher education. There would be need for 'cooperating teachers' to be appropriately trained for the role of mentoring so that they offer productive support for professional learning of student teachers. It would be necessary to ensure that student teachers receive appropriate support from school teachers if teaching practice is to remain one of the most important sources of effective professional learning in schools.

3.3.2 Learner-centred education

A notable issue in initial teacher education concerns the reform agenda of instruction that is experiential, learner-centred, activity-oriented, interconnected, constructivist and reflective practice (Kennedy, 1995; Korthagen, *et al.,* 2006). The term 'learner-centred' education describes a concept and a practice in which pupils and teachers learn from one another. It proposes a global shift away from instruction that is fundamentally teacher-centred, focusing instead on learning outcomes. It is not intended to diminish the importance of the instructional side of the classroom experience. Instead, instruction is broadened to include other activities that produce desirable learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2007). Learner-centred

teachers articulate what society expects pupils to learn, design educational experiences to advance their learning, and provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their success in achieving those expectations. A learner-centred education environment grows out of curricular decisions and in-class strategies which encourage pupils' interaction with the content, with one another and the teacher, and with the learning process. It encourages pupils' reflection, dialogue, and engagement, and requires a reliable assessment of their content mastery (UNESCO, 2007).

Notions of learner-centred education have a long history, reaching back to Plato's Socratic dialogue, where through strategic questioning; the teacher drew out the ideas of the pupils. A book, ''Emile'' by Rousseau, published in the 18th century, was the first comprehensive presentation of learner-centred ideas (Darling, 1994). Rousseau argued that children are naturally active, both physically and mentally, and that education should build on this activity, taking account of individual differences and the levels of development of the child (Darling, 1994). Friedrich Froebel was the first person to use the term learner centred education in 1889. He argued that schooling should fit children's stages of development (Chung and Walsh, 2000). The Plowden report (Plowden, 1967) led to the widespread adoption of learner-centred education in the UK in the 1960s. Learner-centred education has also dominated teaching in most of the Western world. Similarly, in developing countries, learner-centred education is promoted (Black *et al.,* 1993; UNESCO, 2007). It is considered an effective antidote to the prevalence of teacher-centred didactic classroom practices, which supports teacher dominance over passive learners and lead to rote learning and the stifling of critical and creative thinking (Jessop and Penney, 1998; Rowell, 1995).

Learner-centred education or aspects of learner-centred education have been promoted in Malawian initial teacher education programmes. A short orientation course for unqualified entrants to primary teaching stressed the active involvement of the learner, guided discovery learning and building on a learner's interests (Croft, 2002). Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) support materials stressed active learning, learning by doing and improvising ways of making the curriculum content meaningful (Croft, 2002). Another example of learner-centred education is evident in the University of Malawi's initial teacher education programmes. Student teachers are taught about learner-centred education and supervisors emphasise that student teachers use learner-centred education during teaching practice. Student teachers at Masambiro College are also encouraged to use learner-centred education during teaching practice (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

Teaching and learning form an important part of EFA global monitoring report 2008 (UNESCO, 2007). Of particular emphasis in the EFA report is 'child-centred curricula'. A child-centred curriculum is a twin skin of learner-centred education. According to UNESCO (2007) there have been trends to revise curricula in many countries to make classroom interactions more dynamic and child-centred. The report shows that there appears to be a move away from "chalk and talk" methods to more discovery-based learning and greater emphasis on outcomes that are broader than basic recall of facts and information (UNESCO, 2007). This suggests that teacher education at both primary school and secondary school levels should emphasise learner-centred education. According to the monitoring report, secondary school teachers who conduct their lessons based on learner-centred education make significant contribution to the attainment of some of the EFA goals (UNESCO, 2007).

The emergence of learner-centred education arises from the quest to have all pupils achieve more success in their educational enterprise. Interestingly some pupils and some teachers resist the learner-centred education in favour of teacher-centred education. Weimer (2002) suggested that teacher-centred education makes less demands upon them, whereas learner-centred pedagogy requires a more active role in the classroom experience (Weimer, 2002). For school teachers, learner-centred education can mean a shift of some level of responsibility to pupils, which may feel like a loss of control. Zemsky et al., (2005) argued that pupils are not always motivated to maximize their learning; pupils choose schools on the basis of the "competitive advantage" they expect the school to provide after graduation. The fact that pupils bring other motivations to bear on their choice of educational environments presents other complications for a learner-centred education.

Bain (2004) offered several characteristics of teachers who embrace learner-centred education. They touch the lives of their pupils; they place a strong emphasis on pupil learning and outcomes through varied forms of assessment. Bain's research also led to the conclusion that such teachers, regardless of school setting, know their subject material extremely well, are active and accomplished, and value critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. Bain (2004) further concluded that learner-centred teachers value teaching and seek to create a critical learning environment and aspire to challenge pupils to confront important problems. Bain (2004) noted that learner-centred teachers have a strong trust in pupils, believe that pupils want to learn, systematically collect feedback on teaching, readily assess outcomes, and make appropriate changes. These teachers work to create a safe learning environment which allows pupils to try, fail, and try again. Bain's (2004) findings concluded that such teachers have a great faith in pupil ability and offer pupils ownership of class objectives. In

addition, learner-centred teachers view teaching as beginning with the pupils and appreciate the individual value of each pupil and a learner-centred teacher does not teach a class, they teach a pupil (Bain, 2004). The discourse on learner-centred education emphasizes "know-how" over "know-what" in terms of knowledge acquisition by learners.

However, research into learner-centred education and curriculum reform has reported mixed results. Some schools in the United States have reported success in restructuring curricula in order to engage learners' ideas and interests and to develop their knowledge in key areas (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Muncey and McQuillan, 1996). Darling-Hammond (1997) noted that these schools aim for: active in-depth learning; authentic performance; attention to development; appreciation for diversity; collaborative learning; collective perspectives across the school; structures for caring and for democratic functioning; and connections to family and community. Achieving these has involved substantial restructuring of schools into smaller schools, and within the smaller schools into teams of teachers who work together and take responsibility to really know and understand pupils. At the same time, collaborative work on projects, thematic curricula and authentic assessment require far more work of teachers than in conventional schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The substantial changes in school organisation required to enable substantive learner centred education raise questions as to the extendibility of this model in developing countries, including those with far fewer resources, like Malawi.

Other research suggested that the ideals of learner-centred teaching are not often attained by teachers. For example, in his historical analysis of schooling in the United States, Cuban (1993), reported that despite a number of reforms, teacher centred practices remained robust, particularly in secondary schools. At the same time, he identified a small number of elementary classrooms where learner-centred practices thrived, where pupils could move about freely to work in activity centres, where clustered desks made it easy for pupils to work together, and where teacher–pupil planning occurred daily. A more substantial number of teachers, also predominantly in elementary schools, developed what he called ''hybrid practices''. They incorporated some elements of learner-centred education, such as group work and student mobility; and not others, such as joint decisions about class activities (Cuban, 1993). A general feature of hybrid classrooms was that teachers remained in control of knowledge production, while allowing pupils limited flexibility in working arrangements. Cuban (1993) explained this using the notion of 'situationally constrained choice' (p. 261), whereby social, cultural and organisational influences function to maintain some elements of teacher-centred practices. In England, Gipps and MacGilchrist (1999) found that most

teachers employed 'mixed pedagogies', using a social constructivist, 'discovery learning' or a transmissive approach according to a notion of 'fitness for purpose'.

A study conducted in South Africa found that while most teachers were enthusiastic about the new post-apartheid curriculum and intended to implement learner-centred practices in their classrooms, they continued to teach in predominantly teacher-centred ways (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999). Where learner-centred ideas were enacted, they did not enable learners' engagement with key concepts in the subject area. While acknowledging organisational constraints such as dysfunctional schools and a teacher-support system that was underdeveloped, Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) argued that teachers' conceptual knowledge was vital to producing this engagement and methods of teaching were of secondary importance. Since teachers' conceptual knowledge is mainly gained during initial teacher education, it means that teacher education did not always ensure that teachers acquired conceptual knowledge of learner-centred education.

In Malawi, learner-centred education faces many challenges and this was evident recently (Nation Newspaper, 2008). According to a report, the new standard six syllabuses for primary school failed to take off as the Malawi Government had failed to deliver books for the initiative when pupils reported for classes in January 2008. The government admitted the problem and attributed it to late printing of the textbooks. Teachers said the one week orientation for the new syllabuses given to the Standard Six teachers was not enough. A director for a Centre for Education and Research (CERT) said that teachers would not be able to deliver as expected because the new syllabus is pupil-centred. He noted that although Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform (PCAR) was a well designed programme, its implementation was not practical. Conditions in schools needed improving. There was need to reducing teacher-pupil ratio (Nation Newspaper, 2008). A teacher also noted that the new syllabuses involve a lot of activities to be done by the pupils but it was difficult for example, to teach English to pupils without textbooks because pupils are denied full participation (Nation Newspaper, 2008). These factors represent difficulties which are there for the implementation of learner-centred education in Malawi classrooms at secondary and primary levels.

In summary, learner-centred education has many implications for secondary teacher education and secondary school teaching in Malawi. It would appear that learner-centred education has received mostly positive attention for secondary school teaching. Learner-centred pedagogy seems to be the right approach to teaching secondary school subjects such

as agriculture in Malawi (I am a teacher educator of agricultural education teachers at Bunda College). The teachers of agriculture will need to prepare pupils so that they are able to apply problem-solving skills and knowledge when they complete secondary school education and become self-employed as farmers. The university sector in Malawi enrols a small section of students from secondary school due to shortage of bed space. Many secondary school graduates end up in rural areas where they engage in farming activities. This is where they may need the appropriate knowledge and skills of secondary school agriculture. A learner-centred pedagogy appears to be implemented well in environments which have appropriate structural requirements such as small class size, availability of resources, and other features such as teacher motivation and pupil motivation. In addition, prevailing school culture may also affect the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy. Some schools may develop their own social practices which may not be in line with the reform agenda of learner-centred education. Croft (2002) suggested that it is necessary to reconceptualise Malawian teacher practices in terms of their pedagogical orientation since learner-centred education will inevitably develop differently in different physical and socio-cultural contexts. This is where the concept of 'hybrid practices' (Cuban, 1993) or 'mixed pedagogies' (Gipps and MacGilchrist, 1999) may become important for teaching and learning in Malawian schools.

3.4 Field teaching practice

Field experiences of student teachers have been regarded as the most favourably viewed component of initial teacher education in contributing to student teachers' professional development (Ben-Peretz, 1995). Zeichner (1996) highlighted the importance of having what he calls an 'educative practicum'. There have been suggestions that it is vital to have good teaching placements for student teachers (Bech and Kosnik, 2002; Burstein, 1992; Clark, 2002; Potthoff and Alley, 1995). This suggests that teaching practice takes into consideration more than the act of carrying out lessons. Consideration is also given to other concerns such as, the community, the school, colleagues, and resources and the whole school system as best captured in the activity system's model of Engeström (1987). Teaching practice poses a number of issues for student teachers. These may relate to developing an identity as a teacher (Britzman, l991), developing a conception of the subject matter and how to teach it (Grossman and Stodolsky, 1994), developing a conception of teaching and learning and the role of a teacher (Grossman, 1990), learning to manage pupil behaviour (Bullough, 1989), learning to teach bored pupils (Kennedy, 1998), and learning to work with colleagues (Smylie, 1994; Spindler and Biott, 2000).

Morvant *et al.,* (1995) offered a broad theoretical perspective of teaching practice. According to Morvant *et al*., (1995) teaching practice serves as a function within the teacher education programme that may hinder or support the achievement of its goals. They suggested that when teaching practice is designed, attention should be given to the manner in which it is structured with particular attention given to the way it is scheduled and organized. A poorly designed teaching practice might lead to frustration and stress. According to Gipe and Richard (1992) an overly threatening field placement may promote a great deal of negativism and stagnation in student teachers. On the other hand, a well designed teaching practice may be a source of motivation and professional development for student teachers. Field teaching practice is also a major vehicle for providing practical experience in any teacher education programme. Teacher education students may consistently describe their teaching practice as the most valuable element of their teacher preparation, however, questions concerning the value of the learning from these experiences have been raised (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1987) with specific attacks focusing on the teaching practice's lack of clear theory and structure and its over dependence on 'an outmoded apprenticeship model' (Cooper, 1995).

Student teachers may often encounter tensions associated with their initial field teaching practice. These challenges include disparities between theory and practice, planned activities and pupils' resistance to those activities, mandated curriculum, school policies, student teachers' own beliefs about those policies, and their idealized commitment to school change and the political realities of the school (Driscoll and Negel, 1993; Furlong and Maynard, 1995; Johnston, 1994). Student teachers are said to receive contradictory messages from different sources (Clift *et al.,* 1994), for example, that they need to succeed on their own, while, at the same time, they are taught the value of cooperative learning. Student teachers are also told to be in control of their classrooms, while being taught to serve as classroom facilitators (Britzman, 1991). Student teachers continually receive mixed messages regarding their performance and expectations from tertiary supervisors and cooperating teachers in the schools. If they attempt to make changes, they may experience resistance from more traditional teachers or administrators in the schools (Vinz, 1995). They may experience political resistance from veteran teachers as they struggle with their idealized sense of mission to change a school (Schempp *et al.,* 1993) or, they may experience pressures to conform to established school practices in order to gain a positive teaching evaluation (Bullough and Gitlin, 1996). This may contrast sharply with what they learn in teacher education institutions that they are supposed to be change agents.

In addition, the issue of how teaching practice is scheduled has raised some debates. For some teacher education programmes, teaching practice takes place at the end of pre-service teacher education. Positioning of teaching practice at the end of the programme holds it up as the capstone of the pre-service teacher preparation (Lugton, 2000). It implies, albeit unintentionally, that teaching practice is a culminating rather than a starting point of the student teacher's professional development (Lugton, 2000). This ignores the fact that without a practical or applied setting in which to critically consider the theory on an ongoing basis, student teachers may not incorporate their theoretical learning into teaching practice (Ghani, 1990). According to Tom (1997) the location of teaching practice towards the end of the programme has also been blamed for 'underplaying the complex nature of the knowledge learned and the difficulty in applying this knowledge to different actual teaching contexts' (p. 140). In longer teacher education programmes, the location of teaching practice at the end has also received condemnation. Tom (1997) argued that student teachers may have forgotten the stockpiled theory by the time they arrive at the teaching practice in longer duration programmes in the sense that, to some extent, the location of the teaching practice only widens the theory and practice gap.

Ghani (1990) applauded programmes that offer a continuous teaching practice by noting that: 'if teaching practice occurs at the same time that theory is being learned, its relevance may more easily be seen, learned and applied' (p. 46). This approach has been supported by neurological research which shows that the more links and associations one's brain creates, through connected and relevant learning, the more neural territories involved and the more firmly the information is integrated (Jensen, 1998: 92). Tom (1997) proposes making teaching practice part of the introduction to the professional curriculum. This repositions it in a more integrated way throughout pre-service teacher education along with more effective systems of support and supervision. This underscores the need for better support and well-managed supervision for student teachers while conducting teaching practice.

3.5 Conceptual aspects of field teaching practice

According to Tang (2003) the teaching practice context is conceptualized as consisting of three major aspects. The aspects are: the action/classroom context (Eraut, 1994); the socio-professional context (McNally *et al.,* 1997); and the supervisory context (Slick, 1998). These aspects are some of the key areas that the current study was interested in. The experiences of student teachers in these contexts during teaching practice are crucial. These aspects can be linked to perspectives within an activity theory framework (as demonstrated in **Chapter**

Four). According to an activity theory framework, teaching practice may be looked at as a dynamic and multifaceted activity comprising several elements such as those in the action/classroom context, the socio-professional context and the supervisory context.

3.5.1 Classroom context

Eraut (1994) observed that the action/classroom context refers to classrooms in which student teachers are introduced with the complex task of teaching and learning. Student teachers' experiences in the school may be chiefly confined to classroom rather than an exposure to the full range of responsibilities of full time teaching (McCulloch and Lock, 1992; Stones, 1987; Turney, 1988; Zeichner, 1996). There may be a number of factors contributing to this as was found in this study (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**). Within the classroom context, pupils are regarded as a significant reference social group to student teachers. They play the role of critical reality definer (Riseborough, cited in Bullough *et al.,* 1991) and have a major impact on student teachers' self. Nias (1989) argued that pupils could validate student teachers' professional competencies by making them feel either technically inadequate or competent.

Bronfenbrenner (2000) noted that teacher development, be it cognitive, social and/or behavioural, depends on both the student teacher and the classroom in which they interact and develop on a daily basis. Pupils play a formidable role in classroom environment in the sense that they enter a reciprocal relationship with the student teacher (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Bronfenbrenner (2000) suggested contributing contextual factors to teacher development in the classroom context such as micro-system constraints, which include pupils' varying levels of cognitive abilities, emotional needs, and behavioural responses in the classroom, large class sizes, heavy teaching loads and lack of materials. Classroom management has also been singled out as a problem of student teachers in their action context (Veenman, 1984). Student teachers may become filled with uncertainty, tension (Lacey, 1977), fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation (Fullan, 1982), often focusing on deficit rather than growth needs (Tardif, 1984).

Survival (Goodman, 1987) and acceptance (Lacey, 1977) can become the prime concerns of the student teacher at this critical time. Survival concerns include one's adequacy as a teacher, possessing sufficient and adequate knowledge, and meeting the expectations of college lecturers, school teachers and pupils. They may further be overwhelmed by simply meeting minimum classroom requirements (Goodman, 1987). Organizing time efficiently may be very difficult (Everett-Turner, 1985; Odell, 1988; Ratsoy *et al*., 1979) because of the

multiple demands made on the time available (Everett-Turner, 1985). Student teachers may also have difficulty with time in relation to detailed planning. Besides selecting what to teach, they may often not be sure when to teach it or for how long (O'Neal and Hoffman, 1984). They may soon find out that ideal goals may not be feasible (Lortie, 1975). Conflicts may arise between curriculum requirements and time schedules on the one hand, and the desire to teach well on the other.

In addition, institutional or policy restraints may affect student teachers in the classroom context. These relate to what Bronfenbrenner (2000) called macro-system constraints. Student teachers may fail to implement new strategies that they feel are worthwhile (O'Neal and Hoffman, 1984). Often there may be inadequate supplies of resources (Everett-Turner, 1985). The tasks of motivating pupils, evaluating learners' needs, and accommodating individual differences may not be the same as described in education courses (Ratsoy *et al.,* 1979). Student teachers may not have enough time, alternative strategies, or background experiences to deal with the complexities of skilled teaching. They often may not make distinctions between actual and ideal choices for educational practice (Osborne and Boisvert, 1989).

3.5.2 Socio-professional context

Within the socio-professional context, student teachers interact with various agents, such as teachers, fellow student teachers, college lecturers and other personnel in the wider school life. These contribute to their construction of teachers' self. This may be related to the parlance of **community** in activity system's model (see **Figure 4.1**). The relationships between student teachers and other teachers in the school system have a social-professional bearing. The concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) is also relevant in understanding the socio-professional context of teaching practice. Wilkin (1992) argued that whether long career teachers act as an occasional resource, provide delegated guardianship or are empowered to undertake active and professional responsibilities of student teachers depends very much on the nature of institute–school partnership at the institutional and interpersonal levels.

Student teachers can rely on at least three major sources of support in the socio-professional context. They can rely on college lecturers, school teachers who may act as mentors/cooperating teachers and workshops or seminars organized during their school placement. However, I noted (see **Section 2.3.4**) that there are few or no in-service workshops among secondary school teachers in Malawi mainly due to lack of funding. For

student teachers in Malawi, they can only look to lecturers, school teachers for support in the socio-professional context. The general aim of the support in the socio-professional context is to provide student teachers with psychological and instructional support (Sabar, 2004). Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) specified the role that mentors can play in the socio-professional interaction with student teachers. The mentor can influence student teachers according to six different aspects such as coaching, practical focused discussion, structuring the context, emotional support and devised learning experiences (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997).

At the interpersonal level, Wang (2001) highlighted that the interaction between schoolteachers and student teachers varies in length and frequency, place where they interact, as well as topics in the interaction. Several researchers (e.g. Blakey *et al.,* 1989; Hammond, 1974; Lacey, 1977; Lortie, 1975) found that student teachers turn to an experienced colleague, especially one who is teaching at the same grade level, as a mentor. Blakey *et al.* (1989) found that student teachers may be afraid to ask for help because they may feel that they have nothing to give in return and that veteran teachers may be willing to help, but do not want to interfere. These predicaments mean a lot for the student teacher in terms of how they progress during teaching practice at school level.

Sabar (2004) discussed the concept of student teachers as 'marginal people' who live under high stress and have difficulty coping with most of the situations they may face in school settings. There is a tendency for 'marginal people' to seek support from people who understand them and are thus attracted to other student teachers. In this case, peers may constitute another important group of agents in the socio-professional context of student teachers. Being in a shared position and having equal status, peers may bring about a supportive learning environment and reduce student teachers' feelings of isolation (Hawkey, 1995). Buchanan and Jackson (1998) argued that peers can serve as a valuable external reference point for student teachers' own self evaluation. However, it can be argued that a peer is equally inexperienced to help out in solving complex dilemmas that their colleagues face in the social-professional context. Peer support may be undeniably critical to emotional survival of student teachers in the absence of support from teachers in the school (O'Neal and Hoffman, 1984).

The difficulty which student teachers may further have in the socio-professional context can be a result of student teachers not being part of the school teachers' biography (Sabar, 2004). This arises from the views that student teachers are new to the school teachers' team and may

not understand the semiotics of the school teachers (Sabar, 2004). It has also been noted that school teachers may often view student teachers or novices as threats to existing conventions and to comfortable routines (Sabar, 2004). Sabar (2004) suggested that as a result of this conflict, school teachers may try to protect themselves against the influence of student teachers by emphasizing the marginality of student teachers and rebutting their suggestions in their professional interactions.

3.5.3 Supervision context

The other aspect of teaching practice is the element of supervision. While student teachers engage in ongoing interactions with the action/classroom context and socio-professional context during teaching practice, they come into contact with supervisors from their teacher education programme and the school. Student teachers have expectations of their college supervisors. Equally the supervisors have certain expectations of student teachers. However, there may be occasions when the expectations of the two groups contradict each other. This may affect the relationship between the student teachers and college supervisors and may affect the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice.

Supervision can be conceptualized differently during teaching practice. According to Dewey (cited in Anderson, 1995) the conceptualization of supervision can be either in form of apprenticeship or more akin to laboratory experiences. In the first case, supervisors assist student teachers in gaining techniques and feelings of self-confidence that will help them survive more comfortably within existing school situations without questioning the status quo. In the other conceptualization more akin to laboratory experiences, the student teachers receive supervisory assistance in developing habits of personal inquiry and reflection about teaching and the context in which it occurs. Within this conceptualization, student teachers could be encouraged to consider a range of possibilities beyond the existing school (Cooper, 1995). Depending on a specific conceptualization of supervision held by supervisors and student teachers, expectations may differ remarkably during teaching practice.

Calderhead (1993) raised concerns related to the contradictory nature of the functions of facilitating student teachers' learning and assessing their teaching. According to Cooper (1995) the goals of supervision are too often not agreed upon, unarticulated, or lack congruence with the rest of the teacher education programme. Cooper (1995) also pointed out the problem of communication among members of the student teaching triad. The areas which have raised problems relate to uncertain role expectation, college-school communication, and interpersonal interactions, among others. Yee (1969) observed that the

student teaching triad (comprising student teacher, college supervisor, cooperating/school teacher) is inherently unstable because there is a tendency for two members in the triad to bond together and isolate the other member. Research has also indicated that the college supervisor makes little impact on the beliefs and practices of the student teacher (Wilson, 2006). There have been calls for the elimination of the college supervisor position. The college supervisor has been also described as a 'disenfranchised outsider' (Slick, 1998). Stone and Morris (1972) also reported considerable research evidence of conflicting values among student teachers, school teachers and college supervisors. Other researchers have defended the contribution of the college supervisor to the traditional triad (Slick, 1997; Wilson, 2006). Lyle (1996) and Stone (1987) have stressed that supervision during teaching practice facilitates student teachers' professional learning by bridging the gap between theory and practice.

In summary, the literature on teaching practice continues to regard teaching practice as an essential component of teacher education in terms of its contribution to professional learning and development. Teaching practice is particularly regarded highly for providing novice teachers the practical experiences of teaching. However, questions about the value of learning during teaching practice have also been raised (see Cooper, 1995). The other aspect which the literature has shown is in regard to the positioning and duration of teaching practice. Some authors have argued that the positioning of teaching practice at different stages during teacher education studies convey the complexity of the value which teacher educators place on teaching practice. In addition, the literature addresses some aspects of teaching practice which I regarded as important for this study. The aspects that the literature addressed are classroom context, socio-professional context and supervision contexts. These aspects can be related to an activity theory perspective in the sense that these aspects relate to the multi-facetedness of field teaching practice. While there are other elements which I have used in presenting the findings in this study, the basis of most of the findings can be traced to these three key aspects of teaching practice.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, to prepare student teachers for teaching practice teacher educators should go beyond the technical aspects of teaching to more complex aspects of teaching including focusing on attitudes, understandings of subject matter and pedagogy, and beliefs about teaching, learning, and self (Goodlad, 1990; McDiarmid, 1990; Reynolds, 1992; Ryan, 1986). Going beyond the technical aspects of teacher education implies looking at more

complex elements within teacher education and its component of teaching practice. This is where an activity theory framework becomes important in this study. An activity theory-led study has the potential to delve into contextual, technical and socio-cultural aspects of teaching practice. It examines the systems within teaching practice and these systems include the secondary school where student teachers conduct teaching practice and the college where they undergo their teacher education programme. It also identifies other subtle subsystems which may affect the experiences of student teachers such as college lecturers, student teachers, pupils etc. In this way, teaching practice is looked at as a mediated multi-faceted activity (Engeström, 1999).

In this Chapter, I have examined perspectives of teacher education and field experiences. I have looked at the international literature on prospective teachers' perceptions of teaching and teacher education with a view of locating the study within the international discourse on initial teacher education. The dependence on literature from other parts of the world other than Malawi was necessitated by a general lack of relevant local literature and lack of studies on secondary school teacher education in Malawi. Based on the literature, this study sought to understand secondary teaching practice in Malawi based on the perspectives from an activity theory perspective. The findings in the study revealed insightful results around action/classroom context, social-professional context and supervisor contexts of teaching practice which were addressed in this chapter. The current study was necessary to provide a contextual understanding of teaching practice in Malawi within the framework of activity theory.

In the next chapter, I address activity theory in relation to how it guided the theoretical and conceptual aspects of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ACTIVITY THEORY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter has been employed to expound on the theoretical framework within which this study on the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice was couched. The theoretical perspective governing the conduct of this study was within an activity theory framework. Activity theory is a versatile framework for workplace and professional development research (Dayton, 2006). I considered teaching practice as a multifaceted professional developmental activity. This consideration helped me to understand some of the key elements within teaching practice with a developmental perspective. I have made efforts to discuss these elements in this chapter and link them to teaching practice. I have dwelt on some of the theoretical and conceptual issues of activity theory, the justification for selecting it and how it applies to the current study focusing on teaching practice. The elements and aspects of teaching practice activity theory resurface in the findings' chapters (**Chapter Seven, Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

4.1 Activity theory

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of student teachers during school teaching practice. As noted in **Chapter Three**, teaching practice is scattered with what appears to be competing tensions in various realities. Activity theory is a theoretical framework that has been used increasingly to investigate the world of professional development (Cook *et al.,* 2002; Engeström, 1999; Grossman *et al.,* 1999; Grossman *et al*., 1993; Roth and Tobin, 2002; Spillane *et al*., 2001; Spillane, *et al*., 1999). Activity theory is an outgrowth of the work of Soviet psychologist, Vygotsky and his colleague, Leont'ev (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978). This theory is based on the premise that 'human activity is endlessly multifaceted, mobile, and rich in variation of content and form' (Engeström, 1999: 20). It is an 'interactive web of actors, artifacts, and the situation' (Spillane, 2001: 23) which can best be understood through a unit of analysis that allows that activity to be viewed from where it takes place. In the case of this study, this means viewing teaching practice during student teachers' placement in secondary school.

Activity theory 'considers actions as events in a collective activity system' (Engeström, 1999: 30). The focal point of this model is the object, as it is the object that connects the

actions to the activity. Engeström (1999: 31) proposed that it is the 'projection from the object to the outcome that . . . functions as the motive' for the activity and gives deeper meaning to the actions. In the case of student teachers on teaching practice, the object or goal may be to become effective teachers. Within activity theory the analysis considers the activity of the actor (subject) as a task is performed toward meeting the object and the outcome.

The interactions with the tools (meditating artifacts), the rules, the community, and the division of tasks are also considered in the analysis (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999). The theory also allows the researcher to view and analyse a problem from the viewpoint of the subjects and the system. Engeström and Miettinen (1999: 10) suggested that the researcher 'constructs the activity system as if looking at it from above'. This relates to Bronfenbrenner (2000), who noted that development must be examined in context and is therefore dependent upon both the developing individual as well as the environment in which development is taking place. Individuals are both producers and products of their environment in that the individual influences and is influenced by the environment. The environment is depicted as a series of interlocking systems, each of which can impact the other.

Bannon (1997) noted that a professional development activity could not exist as an isolated entity. An activity is undertaken by a human agent (subject) who is motivated toward the solution of a problem or purpose (object), and mediated by tools (artifacts) in collaboration with others (community). The structure of the activity may be constrained by cultural factors including conventions (rules) and social strata (division of tasks) (Engeström, 1987). Engeström (1987) calls attention to the mediational role of the community and that of social structures including the division of tasks and established procedures. Bannon (1997) states that activity theory's emphasis on social factors and on interaction between agents and their environments explain why the principle of mediation plays a central role in the framework.

Reflected in this socio-cultural activity theory is Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of situated learning, which suggests that all learning should be understood as a process of participation in communities of practice. According to Lave and Wenger (ibid), learning occurs through apprenticing with others who are already part of a particular community or culture. In this manner, models of teacher education should be based on the premise that student teachers need to address and solve problems within the context in which they occur-the field experience (Alley *et al.,* 1997). The facilitation of student teacher learning thus has to do with understanding and providing a field experience.

4.2 Elements in activity system's model

An activity system model (see **Figure 4.1**) operates as various elements and each of the elements contributes to the activity in their own particular way. The activity system is normally located in particular settings. The settings and the contribution that each element makes to the system influences the outcome in any activity. In the discussions that follow, I examine the elements in the activity system by assessing what each of the elements contributes to the study. The other part of the discussion is an examination of inherent **contradictions**, **clashes** or **dissonance** that may surface in an activity system. The elements which I discuss here formed the guiding lens for exploring teaching practice and the analysis of the data in the study.

4.2.1 Subject, object, and outcome

According to **Figure 4.1** below, the **subjects** are described as the identified individuals in an activity system whose activities are being examined. The **object** is looked at as the immediate goals or motives that subjects aim to achieve in an activity system with the help of the mediational role of the social environment. The **outcome** is described as the purposes of the actions as well as the purposes of the community (Waite, 2003) in an activity system. In a secondary school setting during teaching practice, the subjects could be the student teachers, the **object** or a motive could be learning-to-teach, and the **outcome** could be becoming effective teachers after completing teacher education programme. Waite (2003: 3) has argued that:

> The perceived difference between the current state of the object and the desired outcome provides the motivation for the subject to develop goals and actions to transform the object into the desired outcome (Waite, 2003: 3).

The **activity** is the general term that describes what the subject (s) is trying to accomplish and typically indicates what **outcome** they are working towards (Waite, 2003). The concept of **object** can also be considered in relation to goals which individuals want to achieve as a result of joining teacher education/teaching. Student teachers may join a professional programme for a variety of idealistic goals which they want to achieve. **Figure 4.1** below is an illustration of an activity system's model as conceptualized by Engeström (1987). An activity theory framework derives from this model.
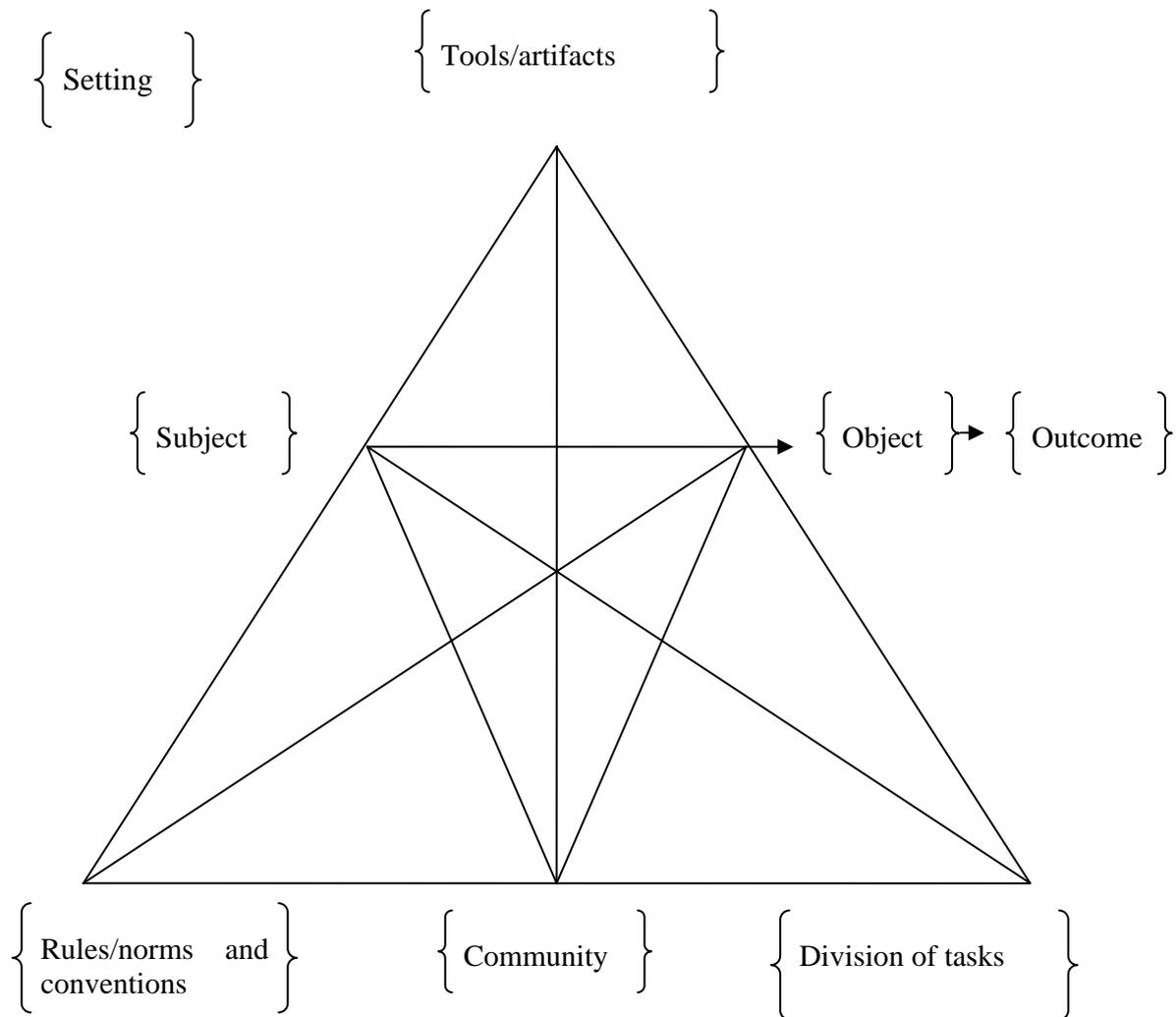
Figure 4.1: Activity system's model

Source: Engeström (1987)

Whatever the specific goal or expectation that leads someone to teacher education/teaching, it is likely to mediate what prospective teachers expect from their professional development. According to Grossman *et al.,* (1999) prospective teachers may focus primarily on the relationship between teachers and pupils, thereby overlooking the academic dimension of the job or may see teaching as a way to continue involvement with the love of for the subject matter. However, there may be other **objects** which prospective teachers may use for joining teacher education/teaching. The **objects** for joining teacher education/teaching in this study are covered in **Chapter Seven** of research findings.

Activities comprise **actions** that are performed in order to accomplish specific goals that would lead to the individual or group achieving desired outcomes. Waite (2003) stressed that after each **action** is performed the situation is assessed to determine the level to which the object of an activity system has been achieved. This calls for a look at the concept of

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appropriation in relation to activity theory. **Appropriation** refers to the process through which an individual adopts conceptual and pedagogical tools and ways of thinking for use in particular social environments (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). The significant thing about appropriation is that appropriation is dependent on a number of factors such as the congruence of subjects' values, prior experiences, and goals with those of more experienced members of the community (Wertsch, 1981). Cazden's (1988) idea of *performance before competence* is also useful in understanding the concept of appropriation due to its emphasis on active participation as a means of becoming competent in social practices. The concept of appropriation provided an understanding of findings on pedagogical activities of student teachers during teaching practice as addressed in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**.

4.2.2 Tools/artifacts

According to activity theory there are **mediating tools** or **artifacts** in an activity system. **Tools** mediate the interactions between the subject and the object. **Tools** are those directly identified by the researcher, through observations and interviews as being used to meet the object of the activity. Bannon (1997) suggested that **tools** are shaped and altered during the development of the activity and are either tangible or psychological in nature. In a school, the subject could have a range of tools such as textbooks, boards, markers, notebooks, pens, computers, and other teaching materials. Other tools related to the work of teaching could include the teachers' academic courses, school curriculum, and dispositions such as a sense of humor, flexibility, and patience (Bannon, 1997).

However, **tools** may at times not be available in some cases to mediate the interactions between the subject and the object. This may conceptually be viewed as a source of contradiction since the absence of a tool may be a source of inconvenience in the performance of tasks. In other cases, even though the tool (s) may be available, the subject (student teacher in this case) may fail to use it all together. The **subject** may want to alter the use of the tool for the sake of making the **tool** more effective or because of failing to master its appropriate use during teacher education. In some cases, pupils on whom the tool is used may resist its use for their own reasons. In this study, **tools/artifacts** related to teaching and learning resources as well as the pedagogical and conceptual knowledge which student teachers relied on to carry out teaching practice (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

4.2.3 Community, rules/norms, and division of tasks

According to activity theory the identified **subjects** engage in an activity that is embedded in a range of relations with other aspects in an activity triangle, such as the **communities,**

norms/rules, and the **divisions of tasks**. An activity theory considers the **community** as those 'multiple individuals or subgroups who share the same general object' or identify with the object (Roth and Tobin, 2002: 114). In a secondary school, the relevant **community** may include multiple teachers, administrators, support staff, pupils, supervisors, etc. in the learning **community**. The issue however is how each member of the relevant **community** contributes to the object of the activity system. The research findings in the study have provided some insight on how schools and the college relate during teaching practice as well as how student teachers and other teachers in the school related both socially and professionally (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

Rules/norms in activity system refer to explicit and implicit regulations and norms that govern actions and interactions within an activity system (Roth and Tobin, 2002). In the case of student teachers on teaching practice, these norms/rules might relate to the general and specific school rules, regulations, and guidelines of the secondary school where they are attached to as well as rules and regulations from their teacher college which govern the conduct of teaching practice. Any clash of rules in activity system may potentially be perceived as a source of tension which may affect the subjects in the manner they carry out actions or relate with other members of the community. The concept of rules/norms was not very relevant in the study even though I related to it in some areas of presenting and discussing research findings in **Chapter Seven**, **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**.

As regards the **division of tasks**, it refers to the role that each individual in an activity system plays in the pursuit of achieving the object of a particular activity. The other consideration within the division of tasks is the 'division of authority and status' (Roth and Tobin, 2002: 114). In a secondary school setting, the power relations between student teachers, other experienced teachers, and administrators could be a very good example. Student teachers may experience tensions with regard to division of tasks, including the division of authority and status. The research findings in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** have provided some insight around division of tasks among student teachers and how that may have affected their experiences of teaching practice. The issue of role ambiguity is also considered as important for student teacher (see Cole and Knowles, 1993).

4.2.4 Activity setting

The **activity setting** refers to the contexts in which all the other elements in the activity system take place. The setting may encourage particular social practices that participants may come to see as worthwhile tools to a better future. At the same time, activity settings may

provide constraints that may limit subjects' efforts to adopt the prevailing social practices (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). An activity setting may have a cultural history through which community members have established specific outcomes that guide action within that setting.

Grossman *et al*., (1999) noted that competing outcomes often coexist within an activity setting. The activity settings provide channels that encourage and discourage particular ways of thinking and acting. According to Grossman *et al.,* (1999):

> Teacher education comprises a number of distinct activity settings, including course work, and the specific classes that make up the curriculum; field experiences, including initial observations, teaching practice, supervisions, etc. Each of these activity settings has its own specific motive, structural features, sets of relationships, and resources for learning to teach. It would appear that the more activity settings that are available, the greater the prospects for incompatible goals to exist, each competing for primacy (Grossman *et al.,* 1999, no page).

With the existence of various **activity settings** in mind, an activity theory framework can help illustrate the *two-world* pitfall (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1984) because it draws attention to the ways individuals develop goals within settings that themselves suggest particular goals, expectations and activities. In addition, Lave (1988) noted that sometimes subjects may perceive the setting in particular ways through their internal representations. Lave (1988) makes a distinction between an arena, which has visible structural features, and a setting, which represents the individual's construction of that arena. In this case, while subjects may be placed at the same setting for teaching practice, they may have different understandings of the school setting based on their own goals, histories and activities within an arena (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). Both **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** of research findings address the views of student teachers regarding the secondary school settings where they conducted teaching practice.

4.3 Systemic contradictions/tensions and innovations

Activity theory is sometimes used to identify some of the underlying issues that produce failures, disruptions, or necessitate **innovations**. The concept of **contradiction** or **tension** applies to dissonance or clashes within elements of a system or between related activity systems (Kuutti, 1996). According to Kuutti (1996) **contradictions** or **tensions** manifest themselves as problems, ruptures, breakdowns, and clashes. Engeström (1999) noted that 'actions in activity systems are not fully predictable, rational, and machine-like; the most well planned and streamlined actions involve failures, disruptions, and unexpected innovation' (p. 32). In complex social systems there may be competing goals, limited resources, differing values and a variety of desired outcomes and when subjects or

participants from different backgrounds meet, they may have different objects/motives without realizing this at first.

The activity system is said to be 'a virtual-disturbance-and-innovation-producing-machine' (Russel, 2002: 71). When there are contradictions activity theory seems to be an effective tool for understanding and, if possible, solving the problem and it prompts people to ask better questions for redesigning activity environments. In research conducted to initiate change or improvements, contradictions or clashes that one discovers can be used to initiate change to the activity system or indeed changes to elements within the activity system (Russel, 2002). This leads to the concept of **innovations**. Creativity and innovation are at the core of the activity theory enterprise. Though activity theory is used descriptively and analytically as a diagnostic framework, its essence is to then take a situation or condition and transform it in an effort to create something better (Bakhurst, 1991). The Marxist principle on which activity theory is based proposes that, '*we don't really understand something unless we are able to transform it*' (Bakhurst, ibid).

In the study, the concept of **contradiction** or **tensions** and **innovations** were applied to various situations in the settings of teaching practice. I came up with various findings on contradictions, clashes or tensions within the activity system of teaching practice. Additionally, I based the **innovations** which student teachers and supervisors proposed in the study on contradictions, clashes or tensions which were experienced during teaching practice (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** for clashes tensions, contradictions and innovations).

In **Figure 4.2** below, I have illustrated how activity theory can be used in an activity system's model of student teachers. Even though I have only presented an illustration of student teachers' activity system here, there are other activity systems which may be linked and influence the activity system of student teachers. For example, teachers in a school where student teacher conduct teaching practice may be regarded as another activity system.

Figure 4.2 below illustrates how activity theory can be applied to the activity system of student teachers during teaching practice.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  ⎧ School setting/  ⎫   ⎧ Tools    for    teaching    practice ⎫              │
│  ⎩ School conditions ⎭   ⎨ (pedagogical/conceptual/teaching      ⎬            │
│                          ⎩ and learning resources etc)          ⎭            │
│                                                                               │
│                                                                ⎫              │
│  ⎧            ⎫              Professional    ⎧ Effective       ⎪              │
│  ⎨ Student teacher ⎬         development     ⎨ teacher/teaching ⎬             │
│  ⎩            ⎭              /learning to    ⎩ certificate     ⎪              │
│                             teach                              ⎭              │
│                                                                               │
│  ⎧ Norms and traditions ⎫  ⎧ Supervisors, other teachers, ⎫ ⎧ Tasks and roles of student ⎫ │
│  ⎨ of school/Norms of   ⎬  ⎨ peers,    pupils,    student  ⎬ ⎨ teachers, authority and status ⎬ │
│  ⎩ teaching practice    ⎭  ⎩ teachers, administrators      ⎭ ⎩                              ⎭ │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 4.2: An adapted activity system's model for student teachers

Source: Engeström (1987)

Equally, college lecturers who supervised the student teachers may also belong to their own activity system of teacher educators. Within these subtle activity systems, there may be different ways of thinking and carrying out activities. These may affect the activity system of student teachers. I have only made an illustration of the activity system model of student teachers because they form the key subjects of my research study.

4.4 Justifying activity theory in the study

There is need to justify the selection of activity theory as the theoretical framework in this study. Activity theory has been praised for having the potential of illuminating how prospective teachers' trajectories through a series of settings can mediate their beliefs about teaching and consequently their practice (Grossman *et al.*, 1999). Grossman *et al.*, (ibid) noted that 'activity theory can help account for changes in teachers' thinking and practice,

even when those changes differ from one case to another case' (p. 4). This is important because it helps to explain that different individuals develop in particular ways when learning a professional activity even though they may undergo similar professional programmes.

Activity theory's emphasis on the settings in which development take place distinguishes it from theoretical perspectives that assume that teaching is a solitary profession (Grossman *et al.,* 1999; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). It focuses on the social and cultural factors that influence development in particular contexts. In this way it offers an understanding of how particular teaching practice settings shape and guide prospective teachers toward particular beliefs and practices about teaching. This is important in this study because student teachers were sent to different school settings and, inevitably, they were exposed to different conditions in their experiences of teaching practice.

The developmental focus of activity theory makes it a powerful framework for exploring components of professional development, particularly in studies that follow prospective teachers as they progress through different social contexts. Studies that focus on settings for professional development can reveal the kinds of social structures that promote the appropriation of tools that in turn result in particular kinds of teaching. An activity theory perspective allows an analysis of the consequences of different approaches to professional development, including university programmes, school-based activities, and other structures with particular goals and practices (Bullough, 1989). This is useful for exploring the roles that settings and orientations contribute towards professional development of student teachers on teaching practice.

As noted from the preceding discussions, activity theory provides a rich theoretical basis for the importance of field experiences. According to Grossman *et al.,* (1999) all too often research on teacher education has polarized the university and school settings and bemoaned the university's lack of influence. Student teachers cannot learn to teach without engaging in the activity of teaching practice in school settings. From this perspective, the design of field teaching practice is absolutely critical to the enterprise of teaching. Activity theory allows researchers to look at the ways in which student teachers grapple with college system and secondary school system in developing as teachers. This is significant for this study in understanding the relationships between college and schools during teaching practice and assessing the roles that schools and colleges ought to play.

Teaching practice is seen as a learning activity involving the process of *social* participation whereby the impact of the *situation* is fundamental. Lave and Wenger (1991) noted that the

mastery of knowledge and skill requires student teachers or novices to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. Learning involves not only reflection upon and drawing implications from previous experiences but is immersed in and with the experience. Legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) concerns the process by which student teachers may move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a school system. The possibilities for learning are defined by the social structure of the community in the school system, and these can be explored through activity theory which puts the learning situation at the centre of the study since it is the main "object" of teaching practice.

4.5 Conclusion

From the discussion in this chapter, I have noted that activity theory is a versatile theoretical framework that can be used in various studies related to professional development. I have argued that activity theory has a unique power to frame a study of student teachers' professional experiences during teaching practice. It allows the multi-dimensional aspects of teaching practice to be considered. It is from these multi-dimensions that potential experiences of student teachers during teaching practice could be explored. The emphasis on settings in activity theory makes it ideal to carry out a study with student teachers placed at different secondary schools during teaching practice. Secondary schools offer settings in which professional experiences about teaching can be interrogated. In addition, several elements of the theory were important in the formulation of research questions in the study. The theory was also pivotal in determining the choice of research methods, data analysis and discussion of findings in the study. There were several aspects of the theory which I used in the analysis and presentation of findings. In the next chapter, I address the qualitative methodological issues that guided the conduct of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in Malawi using perspectives from an activity theory framework. This study adopted a qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of student teachers. Educational researchers use several different approaches to study issues related to teaching and learning based on their orientation and the issue at stake. In this chapter I explore how a qualitative inquiry was selected as the methodology in the research study as well as how it guided the direction and procedures of the study. In addition, I discuss the setting and background issues about the teacher education programme on which the participants in the study were enrolled. I also address epistemological, methodological and ethical principles which played key roles in the study.

5.1 Philosophical assumptions about research knowledge

Researchers make different assumptions about the nature of the social world of education and about the nature of knowledge, and these assumptions influence the type of research which individuals can conduct. On one hand are researchers who ontologically assume that the social world has an *objective reality.* They believe that schools, classrooms, teachers, students, etc. exist independent of the researcher and that they are available for study in an objective, unbiased manner (Arends, 2004). This epistemological perspective is often referred to as *positivism.* Positivists are more likely to conduct quantitative research; an approach to research that assumes an objective reality.

On the other hand are researchers who subscribe to *constructivism.* The current study lends itself to constructivism. Constructivism is epistemologically a different perspective about the social world and the nature of knowledge. Constructivism has gained favour among the educational research community during the past thirty years (Arends, 2004). Researchers who subscribe to this perspective believe that the social world does not exist independently but is instead constructed by the participants of the study as well as the researcher. Constructivists are more likely to conduct qualitative research, an approach that relies on holistic observations. These researchers report data in narrative rather than quantitative form, and conduct the whole research process in a more personalized and interpretative fashion (Arends, 2004).

The interpretive nature of qualitative research suggests that qualitative researchers tend to follow a hermeneutics approach. Hermeneutics refers to the study of the interpretation of texts. The concept of "text" is extended beyond written documents to any number of objects subject to interpretation, such as experiences. Essentially, hermeneutics involves cultivating the ability to understand things from somebody else's point of view, and to appreciate the cultural and social forces that may have influenced their outlook (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2005). Hermeneutics is the process of applying this understanding to interpreting the meaning of written texts or experiences. Hermeneutics inquires into the meaning through understanding the point of view and 'inner life' of an insider, or the first-person perspective of an engaged participant in any phenomenon (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2005).

According to Cohen *et al.*, (2000) in constructivist research:

> humans actively construct their own meanings of situations; meaning arises out of social situations; behaviour and data are socially situated, context-related, context-dependent and context rich; realities are multiple, constructed and holistic; inquiry is influenced by the choice of the substantive theory used to guide the collection and analysis of data and in the interpretation of findings; the attribution of meaning is continuous and evolving over time; social research examines situations through the eyes of the participants; generalisability is interpreted as generalisability to identifiable, specific settings and subjects rather than universally; the process of research and behaviour are as important as the outcomes (Cohen *et al.,* 2000: 137-138).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the characteristics of constructivism as outlined in the above statements imply that:

> Qualitative studies must be set in their natural settings as context is heavily implicated in the meaning; purposive sampling should be used since it enables the full scope of issues to be explored; the outcomes of research are negotiated; trustworthiness replace more conventional views of reliability and validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 39-43).

I would like to reiterate that this study is largely informed by the constructivist paradigm of knowledge. The adherence to the constructivist view of knowledge generation is manifested in a strategic decision to use a qualitative research method. The next section examines qualitative inquiry in relation to the way it was applied in the study.

5.2 Qualitative inquiry

In order to explore teaching practice using the perspective of activity theory, a qualitative research design was employed. According to Silverman (2005) qualitative research designs tend to work with relatively small number of cases. It has been noted that qualitative researchers 'are prepared to sacrifice scope for detail' (Silverman, 2005: 9). The detail in qualitative research is found in the precise particulars of such matters as people's understandings and interactions. This is because qualitative research tends to use a non-positivist model of reality.

Qualitative research lends itself to describing *what is going on* with a specific topic, as well as presenting a detailed view of a topic as it takes place in its natural setting (Creswell, 2002). On the contrary, the use of quantitative methods to examine a phenomenon calls for the use of predetermined categories of analysis that may undermine levels of depth, detail, and openness (Patton, 2002). Those constraints could hinder the development of vivid examination of the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice.

Patton (1985) contributing towards qualitative inquiry explained that:

> Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting…the analysis strives for depth of understanding (Patton, 1985:1).

It has been stressed that qualitative research methods can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomenon under study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Researchers seek answers on how social experiences are created and given meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:10).

Teaching practice design issues are particularly suited to a qualitative research approach due to their composition, i.e. teaching practice design is concerned with the setting and the context associated with the *how* and *what* of the activity being studied. A qualitative inquiry would help answer the research questions of what is going on in particular activity setting by examining the experiences of the subjects under study within a professional activity system. Activity theory emphasizes, among other things, examining the setting in which an activity takes place.

Specifically, a cross-case qualitative research design was adopted for this study. Cross-case study as described by Patton (2002) enables the exploration and interpretation of experiences of student teachers within and across different school settings. This can allow the collection of comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about cases of interest even though they are placed in different settings (Patton, 2002: 447). Stake (in Patton, 2002) noted that using a cross-case study design to explore a phenomenon allows for a 'coming to understand its activity within certain circumstances' (p. 295). To fully understand the experiences of student teachers on teaching practice it is important to examine their experiences in a manner that allow for a deeper understanding of *what, how* and *why* people undergo such experiences in their teaching practice. An activity theory framework has the capacity to delve on the

issues that student teachers experience and also on the settings in which teaching practice is conducted.

5.2.1 Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling

Qualitative research uses non-probability sampling as it does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample or draw statistical inference. Purposive sampling is one technique often employed in qualitative investigation. With a purposive non-random sample the number of participants in a study is less important than the criteria used to select them. The characteristics of individuals are used as the basis of the selection of the research participants.

In addition, Flick (2002) states that:

> What is decisive for choosing one sampling strategy over the other is whether it is rich in relevant information. Sampling decisions always fluctuate between the aims of covering as wide a field as possible and of doing analyses that are as deep as possible. The former strategy seeks to represent the field in its diversity by using as many different cases as possible. The latter strategy, on the other hand, seeks to further permeate the field and its structure by concentrating on single examples or certain sectors of the field. Considering limited resources (human power, money, time etc.) these aims should be seen as alternatives rather than projects to combine (Flick, 2002: 87).

This statement by Flick (2002) was very crucial in the study. In addition, the constructivist assumption about knowledge generation helped me to use purposive sampling in this study. In particular, I used fewer cases of student teachers at two secondary schools. In activity theory, subjects are considered within the activity system. The proposed subjects or primary participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling from student teachers on teaching practice. Merriam (1998) suggested that 'purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which most can be learned' (p. 61). Purposive sampling means that the 'researcher handpicks the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of his/her judgment of their typicality' (Cohen *et al.,* 2000: 103).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that:

> Many qualitative researchers employ purposive sampling and they seek groups, settings and individuals where the processes or phenomenon being studied are most likely to occur (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 370).

I expected that I would be able to build up a sample that fitted the specific needs of the study through purposive sampling. The needs of the study were to do with experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. I purposively included student teachers who were in second year and third year of their teacher education programme. I also involved convenient sampling by selecting student teachers who showed willingness to participate in the study. I

did this on the assumption that it was going to be unethical to force individuals to participate in the study. I also wanted to make sure that I had a sample of participants who would be able to present honest and critical views on their experiences.

There are different approaches to purposive sampling, some of which focus on different aspects of the sample members. In some cases, sample members may be chosen for reasons such as where sample members are considered as more extreme. This may be a source of bias in the research study. In this research study, I did not purposively select members based on characteristics such as 'members with more extreme views'. I selected participants based on the virtue that they were conducting teaching practice in central Malawi. There was no secret research agenda I wanted to achieve other than interpreting student teachers' experiences in line with the hermeneutic research approach.

According to Silverman (2005) one is likely to choose a site that, while demonstrating the phenomenon in which we are interested, is accessible and will provide appropriate data reasonably readily and quickly. The choice of central region of Malawi as the research site for empirical data collection was necessitated by pragmatic reasons such as ease of access and this minimized travelling cost while at the same time I was able to meet many student teachers. These participants demonstrated the typicality of features required for the study such as 'being in second and third year' and 'on teaching practice' (Cohen *et al*., 2000).

5.3 The setting of the research: Masambiro College

In this section, I describe the programme on which student teachers in the study were studying on. This has been done with the view of providing some background to the nature of teacher education and inherently teaching practice. According to documents that I accessed, Masambiro College was established in response to an investigation carried out in the early 1990s. The investigation had revealed a shortfall of teachers in secondary schools. The shortage was due to natural attrition through deaths, retirements and resignations. The investigation also revealed a serious shortage of teachers as a result of opening more secondary schools by the government and the private sector.

5.3.1 The requirements for enrolment in teacher education programme

The Masambiro College's prospectus states that the college's mission statement is:

> to train teachers who shall make a positive contribution to national development and shall instill, in its students, attributes necessary for social and economic growth, and for making education a life-long activity (Masambiro College Prospectus, 2000: 8).

The admission requirements of the college are as follows: The applicant must have an MSCE or its equivalent, obtained within the last three years; the applicant should not be more than forty years of age; the applicant must have at least a credit in English and not less than three credits in subjects in the programme they wish to study. The two subjects of study must be stated and the aggregate in these two subjects must not exceed ten[1] points. Apart from basing selection on performance on MCSE, the selection process is also based on bed space and performance in entrance examinations set by the college.

Currently the male's hostels can take 390 student teachers while the female hostels can take only 270 student teachers. In relation to entrance examinations, selection of student teachers is based on their performance in three subject areas, namely, numerical skills, reasoning skills and communication skills. The selection process is similar to the selection into the University of Malawi. Candidates' scores are added and the students are ordered according to their performance from Highest to Lowest, so only those who have performed well are selected. It is obvious that more male candidates enrol on the teacher education programme compared to female candidates. Thus, more male teachers are trained than female teachers. The consequence of this can be the perpetuation of male dominance of secondary school teaching and other gender related consequences (see **Chapter Two**).

There are some implications regarding the requirements of enrolment above. An average of ten point grades meant that the entrants enrolled with lower grades compared to entrants to other courses in the university. The academic standards of Malawi view a grade of five points as a weaker pass in the MSCE. This suggested that candidates who joined the programme with an average of ten point grades were average performers. Numerous studies of academic abilities of prospective teachers have been conducted (e.g. Vance and Schlecty, 1982). The results of these studies point to the conclusion that prospective teachers are normally average performers. The study by Vance and Schlecty (1982) showed that prospective teachers were overrepresented among the lowest scorers on standardized aptitude tests, and underrepresented among the highest scorers.

Similar results have been obtained in other countries. In Nigeria, for example, disproportionate numbers of undergraduates in education came from the lowest 10% of the university students; 50% of those who applied for admission to education had been rejected

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[1] Note that in Malawi, the grades at MSCE are designated in the following way: 1 and 2 denote distinction, 3, 4, 5, 6 denote credit, 7 and 8 denoted bare pass, and 9 denote a fail.

from their favoured programmes of study (Neururer, 1995). These findings have led to a conclusion that to improve the quality of education more academically able prospective teachers must be recruited. This conclusion, however, has not been without its critics.

> Test scores are not clear evidence of quality or lack of quality. Teacher quality should be more influenced by what teacher candidates learn after they enter college than by the entrance examination scores they presented at matriculation (Darling-Hammond, 1990: 272-73).

Other researchers have argued that the desire to enlist students with the highest grade average and test scores fails because a positive relationship between a single attribute, academic ability, and quality teaching has not been forthcoming (Otis-Wilborn *et al.,* 1988:108). Equally, despite the vociferous criticism levelled at the teaching field, a consensus has yet to emerge as to the vital academic, personal and professional qualifications of prospective teachers particularly in light of the number of new teachers needed in many countries in the world (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

5.3.2 The organisation of teacher education programme

The teacher education programme at the college includes two major components: formal coursework and field experiences. The ultimate field experience is generally referred to as teaching practice. The formal coursework comprise the vast majority of the credits earned in the programme. Prospective teachers attend regularly scheduled classes and learn about their academic discipline, foundations of education, and curriculum and instruction. The academic discipline is the subjects that prospective teachers intend to teach. These subjects range from history, geography, physical science, biology, home economics, Bible knowledge, Chichewa, English and physical education. The primary purpose of courses in the academic discipline is to ensure that prospective teachers have a good grounding in the subject areas they intend to teach.

The other courses, educational foundations, consist of courses in history, philosophy, psychology, administration, and sociology as these disciplines apply to education. The inclusion of educational foundations courses in the programme is based on the premise that teachers have to know and appreciate past events, develop a philosophy that guides their actions, understand how their pupils learn (or fail to learn), and be cognizant of the social institutions that interact with and influence what happens in school. The courses in curriculum and instruction focus on the aims of education, the structure of knowledge, means by which the knowledge to be learned has to be sequenced and integrated, ways of assessing learning, and methods or strategies that could be used to transmit knowledge and facilitate learning. The purpose of these courses is to help prospective teachers build bridges between

what children already know and what they are expected to learn, to help students cross this metaphorical bridge, and determine when they have, in fact, crossed it.

5.3.3 The organisation of teaching practice

Field experience constitutes the second major component of the teacher education programme. Field experiences include visits to schools, discussions with teachers, classroom observations, and actual teaching. Teaching practice is arguably the ultimate field experience. During teaching practice student teachers are expected to teach two subjects in the non-examination secondary classes.

During teaching practice student teachers have hands on experience of teaching. It involves student teachers observing lessons and later teaching their own lessons. The teaching practice gives students the opportunity to relate the theories, assumptions, and practices examined in college to their own classrooms and to implement the goals and objectives established during their studies in college. During teaching practice student teachers are taught to assess their own strengths and weaknesses and determine appropriate approaches to varying contexts.

The educational rationale for teaching practice is the translation of the curriculum theory, as taught at the college into immediate practice. This is to be done through regular peer-teaching, micro-teaching, field experience programmes, as well as block teaching practice programme. According to the Masambiro College Teaching Practice Handbook (2003), the general aims of teaching practice are:

(a) To ensure the meaningful translation of theory into practice;

(b) To prepare a competent, effective and efficient secondary school teacher; and

(c) To promote ongoing professional development and induction into the teaching profession.

The objectives of teaching practice are:

(a) To plan and prepare individual lessons for effective teaching and learning;

(b) Present individual lessons competently and confidently;

(c) Use the chalkboard and other teaching/learning aids effectively;

(d) Correct pupil's classroom exercises, tests and assignments efficiently;

(e) Evaluate individual lessons, classroom exercises and tests, homework and assignments;

(f) Recognize the nature of individual differences and take this into consideration when teaching;

(g) Apply techniques for effective classroom management and control;

(h) Demonstrate a positive professional attitude to teaching;

(i) Demonstrate the ability to deal with interpersonal situations; and

(j) Evaluate oneself for continued improvement.

There are a number of guidelines that student teachers are supposed to adhere to during teaching practice as stipulated in the college's teaching practice handbook. These include the following:

(a) As temporary members of the school staff, student teachers are expected to participate fully in the total school programme in addition to the specific teaching activities designated for each semester programme;

(b) Student teachers are required to meet normal expectations regarding dress, grooming, punctuality, leave of absence, and personal conduct as detailed by the school head or as determined in consultation with the cooperating teacher;

(c) Student teachers are expected to be keen, co-operative and ready to use initiative in the classroom;

(d) Student teachers should be ready to accept advice and to act on it, to discuss classroom techniques, personal obstacles to effective teaching (such as lack of control, poor use of voice, etc) and particular problems created by social, cultural or intellectual backgrounds of the pupils;

(e) Student teachers should assist readily with general supervisory duties as directed by the school head or cooperating teacher. At all such times the student teacher must be accompanied by the cooperating teacher or another member of staff;

(f) All student teachers should respond readily to requests to perform teacher's aides functions in the classroom at any time when they are not otherwise engaged in the various activities specified for their semester programme;

(g) Student teachers are encouraged to solve conflicts that arise in schools amicably (Masambiro College Teaching Practice Handbook, 2003).

Teaching practice at Masambiro College runs for twelve weeks and is split in two phases. The first phase of teaching practice is at the end of the second year while the second teaching

practice is at the end of the third year. Student teachers are placed at various secondary schools across the country for teaching practice. Supervisors visit student teachers in their respective secondary schools as part of the observation and assessment procedures of teaching practice. In the third year, the student teacher is observed and a grade is given based on what the supervisor observed. This grade contributes towards the quality of the certificate award that the student teacher receives. The requirement by the college is that student teachers be only allowed to teach pupils who would not sit for national examinations in that year. This means they teach in either Form 3 or Form 1. The college justifies this by arguing that examination classes (Form 2 and Form 4) do not need disruptions.

At the end of teaching practice student teachers in the third year of their teacher education programme graduate if they pass teaching practice and college courses. These student teachers are now ready to be integrated in the mainstream of the teaching profession in government secondary schools. The student teachers in second year go back to college to complete the third year of their studies.

5.3.4 The primary research participants in the study

There were two categories of primary research participants in the current study. The first category comprised two sub-categories of ten female student teachers and twelve male student teachers. This category of participants was made up of student teachers in both the second and the third year of their diploma programme. Some members of this category had previous teaching experience as primary school teachers with either primary school teaching qualification or with no qualification at all. The other members in this category had no previous teaching experience or primary school teaching qualification. This category provided interview data on the first research question which centred on perceptions of student teachers regarding the teaching profession. I used a diverse group of participants to answer this research question to generate wider views from student teachers about their perceptions of secondary school teaching.

The second category of primary research participants comprised student teachers without any prior teaching experience or qualification in primary school teaching. These student teachers were placed at two secondary schools. I conducted intensive fieldwork with student teachers at these two secondary schools. In terms of academic background, the student teachers at the two selected secondary schools were pre-service teachers having been selected to pursue a diploma programme after completing the MSCE. The age ranges of student teachers at the

two secondary schools were 18-25 years. In the study, I was particularly interested to explore the experiences of student teachers without any previous experience of teaching.

One of the secondary schools was a catholic mission school which only enrolled female pupils. The management of the school favoured female teachers than male teachers. Inevitably, the student teachers who were placed at the school for teaching practice were all female. They were all in the third year of their studies on the diploma programme. The other secondary school where student teachers who provided extensive data conducted teaching practice was a government co-education conventional secondary school. There were three male student teachers and one female student teacher in second year at the secondary school.

The criterion for selecting these student teachers at the school was that they had no previous teaching experience. They had completed MSCE and were later selected to the college for the diploma programme as pre-service student teachers. In essence, all participants at the two secondary schools were novices in that they had no teaching experience and no prior education courses before enrolling on the diploma programme. There were five female student teachers in my sample and three male student teachers and this may suggest that data collection was skewed towards women. It would be necessary for readers of the current study to take this in consideration when evaluating the findings in the study.

Secondary school	Type of data	Location	3rd Year		2nd Year	
			Female	Male	Female	Male
Limbani Mission Girls Secondary	Interview, observation, critical incident log	Semi-City	4	0	0	0
Gawani Conventional Co-education	Interview, observation, critical incident log	Rural	1	1	1	3
Namate Conventional Co-education	Interview	Rural	0	1	2	4
Mapone Community Co-education	Interview	Rural	2	3	0	0
		Total	7	5	3	7

Table 5.1: Distribution of student teachers and nature of data collected

Table 5.1 shows a summary of student teachers and the secondary schools where they conducted teaching practice. For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms have been used to disguise the secondary schools where student teachers conducted teaching practice. Limbani secondary school and Gawani secondary schools were the two main schools where key informants in the study conducted teaching practice. Student teachers who conducted teaching practice at the other secondary schools were only involved in providing specific data in relation to their perceptions regarding the teaching profession. Four second year student teachers who conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school returned to Masambiro College after teaching practice to continue with their teacher education programme. I followed them there for in-depth interviews.

5.3.5 The secondary research participants in the study

The secondary participants in the study were college lecturers who supervised student teachers during teaching practice at the four secondary schools above. The other participant who also supervised the student teachers was a teaching practice coordinator for central region of Malawi. There was one female and four male lecturers. The years of experience for the lecturers ranged from one year of secondary school teaching to twenty five years of teaching experiences. The lecturer who had one year secondary school teaching experience had only joined Masambiro College while the student teachers in the present study were on teaching practice. He was well known to me as my junior during our university studies.

The lecturers who supervised student teachers were subject methodologists, educational foundations specialists as well as subject specialists. The subject methodologists are the ones who teach curriculum and teaching studies. Curriculum and teaching studies involve teaching prospective teachers the pedagogy of specific subjects in the secondary school curriculum. The educational foundations lecturers teach courses in educational sociology, educational psychology, leadership and administration and other foundational courses. The subject specialists teach the specific subjects which student teachers choose to teach in secondary school. These subjects include biology, home economics, geography, history and others.

The supervisors of student teachers were drawn from these three disciplines of the college faculty. The discussion here suggests that supervisors were diverse in terms of teaching experience as well as diverse in terms of their specializations. I met and interviewed supervisors on two occasions. I also kept meeting supervisors in secondary schools as they supervised student teachers. During those meetings, I asked them some questions on what they were observing in various classrooms. They shared with me how they thought teaching

practice was progressing. They were enthusiastic to share their experiences. However, I made sure I did not take most of their time to the extent of disrupting their supervisory routines.

Having addressed the research setting and the participants in the current study, I now explore the research principles that were considered useful in the study. These are epistemological, ethical and methodological principles. These principles were important in ensuring that empirical data collection was well-informed by appropriate practices within qualitative research standards.

5.4 Epistemological principles

Epistemological principles relate to the 'quality of data collected, in terms of the confidence it gives as the evidence for knowledge, understanding and explanatory claims about educational problems, issue or phenomenon' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004: 180). Two issues under epistemological principles that governed data collection in this study were:

      (a) Collecting the right kind and amount of data;

      (b) Obtaining valid and reliable data.

These issues mainly help in determining whether a research undertaking meets satisfactory tests of high quality data collection so that other people could accept the process and the results of the whole study.

5.4.1 Right kind and amount of data

Lankshear and Knobel (2004: 180) pointed out that the 'data one collects must be relevant to one's research questions'. The data must be also consistent with the kind of conceptual and theoretical position one has adopted for their study (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In the case of this study, that means the data must be consistent with an activity theory perspective, qualitative inquiry and other conceptual issues of student teachers that the literature review addressed. Data collection is resource intensive and therefore it becomes wasteful for one to collect more data than needed. Equally, collecting insufficient data to be able to arrive at useful or plausible conclusion is wasteful since it is not possible to do anything satisfactory with resources that have already been used to collect data (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004).

In this study, I attempted to make sure the right amount of data was collected by using an approach of getting a range of opinions and views from student teachers placed in different secondary schools. The variety of school settings that the study looked at were mission school and conventional schools. In this way I hoped that a range of issues under study could

be obtained and some patterns in response to the research questions would emerge for interpretation. In addition, some supervisors and a teaching practice coordinator were included as participants who provided additional data in the research study.

I considered the relative usefulness of conducting semi-structured interviews in comparison to structured interviews. I settled for mostly semi-structured interviews. Most of the questions in the interviews could not be answered at one point because they required participants to experience teaching practice first. As such I kept going to the schools to ask student teachers some interview questions which were relevant at those times that I visited the schools. I made sure I gave a copy of the interview schedules to student teachers to think about the questions before I conducted interviews.

At the same time, critical incidents logs were considered as a way of corroborating and consolidating the data from interview questions. I hoped that these critical incident logs would record more personal and private feelings and issues that student teachers experienced and how they might have been affected by those issues. I hoped that critical incident logs could capture issues which individuals would not openly share during more formal interview sessions. I also carried out lesson observations. This was viewed as a way of corroborating the data collected through interview questions and critical incident logs. To collect observable data, I arranged with a number of participants that I sit in their class while they conducted lesson activities.

The in-depth follow-up interviews were also conducted with a small number of participants. This was done to enrich data from the interviews, observations, critical incident logs, I had conducted during teaching practice which involved many participants. By the end of these interviews I gathered additional data on the issues that the study was addressing. I had confidence that I had obtained the right kind and amount of data on the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. I conducted in-depth interviews at the end of teaching practice when participants were relatively freer from the pressure of teaching practice. At that point some student teachers who had participated in earlier interviews were also able to reflect on many issues that had occurred during teaching practice.

5.4.2 Validity and reliability of data

In qualitative research validity and reliability are terms loaded with meanings and connotations as a result of the way they are used by quantitative researchers (Flick, 2002). Valid data in qualitative research is 'data that actually does get at what one aims to find out through data collection' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In the case of this study, it is

important to note that the data collected was meant to get at the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. A careful formulation of research tools was done to make sure that the data collected was valid. This involved refining questions that were ambiguous to the extent that they had to be clear. The research tools were also subjected to refinement after testing them on my colleagues who had taught at Masambiro College but had just joined the University of Malawi as lecturers. I also piloted the research tools on some former students from Masambiro College to make sure that they were comprehensive and appropriate and ready for use on student teachers.

Reliability in qualitative research involves collecting data from different participants while making sure that participants' understanding of what is asked of them is as close as possible to my own understanding, as well as being as close as possible to the other research participants (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In this case, different participants should understand the same interview questions, critical incident log and observation schedule in the same way. To ensure reliability an attempt was made to talk to all student teacher participants at the same time, to read to them all the questions and find out if they understood what each question was asking. Where participants expressed ignorance of the issues the question was addressing, clarifications were made with the whole group. In addition the questions were piloted on some colleagues who had been secondary school teachers, to find out how they understood them. Any ambiguities that I observed during the pilot were clarified.

The other aspects of validity and reliability take the form of credibility and trustworthiness of data. Most researchers aspire that others who read their research should have confidence in their data and have good grounds for respecting its integrity (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In this sense, sound research will only be produced from good quality data. One of the ways to ensure quality of data is to check with research participants that what one has as data is what the research participants meant to say and not otherwise. In this study the quality of data was subjected to participant checking. This involved showing participants the data assembled from the tools and asking them to verify if what had been recorded was what they meant. Where participants rejected the data, the clarification that they gave was instead added to replace the misconstruction from the assembled data. Importantly, participants were generally happy that the data I had captured reflected their views and experiences. All attempts were made to minimise the amount of variation in the tools so that reliable and valid data could be obtained.

In addition, participants and I worked together to construct the reality of teaching practice experiences by being constantly engaged until they agreed that what I had collected was their understanding of teaching practice experiences. However, the limitations that the quality of data suffered in this study are presented in another section (see **Section 10.5**).

To further check the trustworthiness of data in this study, the approach that I adopted was using a number of tools for data collection. The participants were given interview schedules and critical incident logs. I also used an observation protocol, pre-observation and post-observation questions with the research participants. Issues that were addressed by the data collection tools were more or less similar. This was done so that it could act as some kind of triangulation. I would like to emphasize that the different tools used to check trustworthiness of data are acceptable for use in qualitative inquiry and research conducted using activity theory framework (see **Table 6.2**).

5.5 Ethical principles

In educational research and other social research ethics is concerned with ensuring that the interests and the well-being of research participants are not harmed as a result of research being done (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). Harm can range from people experiencing affronts to their dignity and being hurt by conclusions that are drawn about them all the way through to having their reputations or credibility undermined publicly (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). Ethnographers could harm the individuals or groups they study when research participants experience anxiety, stress, guilt and damage to self-esteem during data collection and interpretations made from the data they provide. The ethical issues that governed this study are discussed in this section.

5.5.1 Research and participant relationship

In observational fieldwork, participants may form close relationships with the observer and experience loss when the study is completed and the observer withdraws (Creswell, 2002). Paradoxically, the closer I may get to the participants, the higher the chances that the participants will feel freer to express themselves (Creswell, 2002). This is good for research as it reduces the artificial behaviour of participants when they are not familiar with the observer. This calls for treading carefully when building relationships with research participants. The research study I carried out was prone to generating close relationships. This was the case because I had to regularly visit secondary schools and meet student teachers. In course of those meetings, some participants tried to ask me a number of

questions. Some of the questions I was asked suggested that some informal relationships were being established.

I realized that, to some extent, this was beneficial for me because it helped me approach the participants as equals. It helped minimize power relations that mostly work to the disadvantage of the researcher. This is the case because in most cases a researcher seems to have more powers and participants would not feel very free to express themselves. This is particularly the case in African societies where boundaries of power are highly adhered to and elder people are supposed to be treated with deference. This treatment would mean that those with less power would hold back some information to some research questions which would affect elders such as college lecturers. That is where I thought equal power relations and the closeness to the participants helped me. However, this does not mean that there was no professional boundary between the participants and the researcher. I operated on commonsensical judgment and always withdrew from situations that would bring unethical closeness.

Patton (2002) noted that in interviews, informants may feel embarrassed about the opinions they hold or because they do not hold opinions on matters about which the interviewer expects them to have opinions. To avoid the probable fear of embarrassing participants in this study, I made sure that participants took part in the study on their own volition without force of any kind. They also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I also made sure they participated because they felt they would be able to answer most of the questions that my study was addressing without thinking that their input was inadequate. In addition, the fact that respondents did not have to be known by names meant that their contribution to the study would not necessarily betray who they were.

5.5.2 Naturalistic inquiry and validity of research design

'Naturalist inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live and work, and . . . may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity' (Patton, 2002: 407). In addition, data collection can be time consuming and participants can easily be made to feel under pressure, inadequate, invaded and so on (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In this study most of the ethical issues in a qualitative design such as the purpose of the study, risk to the participants, reciprocity, and confidentiality were addressed. The informed consent statements that participants signed when they agreed to participate in this study (see **Appendix C**) illustrate the efforts that I took to secure informed consent from participants. Prior to the beginning of each interview or classroom observation, each participant had to sign an informed consent

form that provided information on the purpose of the study, proposed procedures, and the anticipated use of the collected data.

Another ethical issue that needed consideration in this qualitative study involved having a valid research design. This was necessary because poorly designed studies may waste participants' time and often lead to refusal to participate in research studies. Mertens (1998) reminds researchers that faulty research is not only a waste of time and money but cannot be conceived as being ethical because it does not contribute to the well being of the participants. To help me come up with a valid research design, I had to read widely on teacher education, qualitative research design, student teachers, and activity theory. The literature I read provided appropriate grounding to design what I thought was a valid research. The courses that I had undergone during my first year on the doctoral programme provided most of the grounding for formulating a valid research design.

5.5.3 Assurance of confidentiality

In naturalistic inquiry, the researcher is charged with the onus of assuring that the privacy of research participants is guaranteed and upheld (Patton, 2002). This is done to make sure that participants are not easily identifiable in a research project and as a way of minimizing any repercussions on the participants in light of the results from any study, particularly when the results do present some controversial and sensitive findings.

It should be noted that the need for participant' privacy in this study was overwhelming. In the first place, some student teachers were graded during teaching practice and they expressed fear that the college might reprimand them for expressing what could be considered as 'unpopular' views. They thought that by expressing their views on the organization of teaching practice, they were criticizing their college lecturers and the college as a whole. As a way of assuring that participants remain unrecognizable, a pseudonym had to be assigned to each school and participants in the study were not referred to by name. This is a traditional ethical criterion aimed at minimizing negative repercussions for participants in light of outcomes of the qualitative study.

I would like to point out that assuring confidentiality and anonymity may actually be quite difficult to put into practice in some qualitative research. This is the case because some schools or student teachers may be readily identifiable because they may have unique features which make them easily recognizable (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). These features may be recognizable as the researcher describes the settings of the study and the profiles of research participants. In this study, while I knew it was not possible to

completely maintain participant anonymity, I made efforts that the presentation of findings does not leave readers to easily identify the participants. However, I had to point out to participants of the possibility of being identified even though their names were not used. In such event the participants were asked if they were still willing to be part of the study. One participant expressed concern but she still accepted to take part in the study. It would appear that this particular student teacher would have opted out of the study had it been that there were a number of student teachers who had felt uncomfortable.

5.5.4 Reciprocity

Research is best practised as a two-way street (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:112).

The goodwill and generosity of research participants can be reciprocated with favours and commitments on the part of the researcher. This action has been commended for helping to build a sense of mutual identification (Glazer, 1982). This has been further commended because it demonstrates the researcher honouring the contribution of participants rather than taking it for granted and actively seeking to put something back in return for what has been requested (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004).

The issue of whether or not to compensate research participants in cash or kind as a way of reciprocity is controversial because compensation can affect the level and quality of data (Patton, 2002). I think that compensation should also be discouraged on the grounds that it may induce unnecessarily 'favourable' responses from participants with a view of pleasing the researcher. Researchers must do the best to make sure that efforts in ensuring reciprocating research participants does not affect the quality of data (Patton, 2002).

In this study I did not intend to make any monetary compensation to participants as a way to return favours. In the first place, the money was not there. If anything, I needed the money more to help with other research logistics other than compensating participants. I would like to mention that one participant asked if I was going to pay them at the end of the research. I reasoned with her that there was going to be no monetary reward. Further, I let her know that this research was purely academic and it would benefit participants in the sense that they might be helping to improve our understanding of teacher preparation.

Patton (2002) suggested that offering complete transcriptions of interviews or copies of interview tapes to participants demonstrates that researchers 'value what participants give by offering something in exchange' (p. 415). In this study I asked participants whether they wanted to cross-check transcriptions of interviews. I also gave them copies of interview schedules and asked them if there was anything they wanted to add. I assumed that the

actions I had taken went towards the right steps of reciprocating the favours from the participants. However, not all participants were able to cross-check the data transcripts.

5.6 Methodological principles

Some authors have looked at methodological principles in preparing and conducting data collection (e.g. Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). These are the principles of elegance and economy, practicality and realism. These principles are very crucial if one is to conduct data collection that stands the test of the rigours of qualitative research. I carefully consider methodological principles in the next sections.

5.6.1 Principles of elegance and economy

The principle of elegance and economy is concerned with 'obtaining the greatest amount of high quality data from the minimum use of resources, and with the least possible complexity in the operation' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:187). This principle involves thinking carefully about the kind of data that will be both necessary and sufficient for addressing the question, and looking for patterns and combinations that will allow 'more to be done more easily with less' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004: 187). I thought that this principle was important because my research had a time and other resource parameters. It was necessary that I try to work towards high quality data with the minimal resources available to me.

In this regard, I selected different secondary schools with a minimum of four student teachers whom I could meet at one place and at the same time and collect some data. I capitalised on the numbers of participants who were allocated in some schools. I made sure that I selected schools that were near to each other as well as near to my place of work. The actions and decisions I undertook took helped me obtain data from the minimal use of resources. I also was able to collect data from supervisors that were accommodated at a motel within easy reach.

5.6.2 Principles of practicality and realism

The principles of practicality and realism entail aligning what one plans to do in the way of data collection with the resources and opportunities that are actually available or likely to be available (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In this study I thought that the participants were going to be busy most of the time as a result a pragmatic decision was made that I settle for a cross-case study. This involved a small group of participants from the two cohorts of student teachers on teaching practice. In addition, the limited resources (such as time and transport) meant that the study could only be conducted closer to the place I was operating from. In that

sense, I decided to conduct my study on student teachers who were conducting their teaching practice in central region of Malawi.

I had to take into account that teaching practice was assessed by supervisors and as such participants had to fulfil supervision requirements first before they could handle my research tasks. On two occasions, I postponed classroom observations because the participants were going to be supervised by college lecturers. Participants openly expressed that college supervision put them under pressure and any additional observation on the day college supervisors were around was asking too much of student teachers. I also waited for teaching practice to come to an end to conduct in-depth interviews with a small number of student teachers. I assumed that at that time the participants would be less busy to be involved in rigorous interviews. I felt that at that time, the student teachers would be able to reflect on the whole process of teaching practice when answering the interview questions.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have noted that the appropriate approach to conduct a study on student teachers' experiences during teaching practice was qualitative inquiry. This seemed ideal because qualitative inquiry assumes that the social world does not exist independently but is constructed by the participants and the researcher in the research field. Therefore, knowledge is constantly being created by those who partake of any activity of interest that a researcher may want to explore. The selection of qualitative methodology was also prompted by the theoretical framework that I had adopted in the study. Activity theory underscores the importance of the settings in which professional development occurs. I have addressed the overall research setting, participants and the sampling strategy. I have also discussed the epistemological, methodological and ethical principles that I had to consider in the conduct of the study. These were useful in ensuring that the empirical fieldwork was informed by appropriate methodological and ethical principles.

In the next chapter, I address the issues around obtaining access to the research field, empirical data collection and the analysis procedures that I followed. These discussions are in line with qualitative research methodology and activity theory as a theoretical framework.

CHAPTER SIX: THE COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

6.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the process of data collection and analysis in this study. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. The student teachers who were involved in this study were in the second and third years of their studies. The participants were followed during their secondary school teaching practice. I observed some of them during their lesson sessions; I also used interview schedules for collecting interview data. I handed out to student teachers critical incident logs where they were asked to make entries of critical incidents they encountered during teaching practice. The student teachers were placed at different secondary schools in central Malawi. Other informants in the study were college supervisors and a teaching practice coordinator. The data that was generated in this study was converted to written text as transcripts. To analyse data *categorical analysis* was used. It is necessary to reiterate that activity theory is not a prescriptive theory. The researcher decides the data analysis technique that can be more meaningful in a qualitative research couched within activity theory perspective. These issues are considered in more details in the proceeding sections in this chapter.

6.1 Practical issues of data collection

It is imperative to set out the practical issues that underpinned data collection in this research. This is necessary for a number of reasons, most importantly; some limitations of the study were implicated in the data collection issues. The other importance of examining practical issues is that data collection in qualitative inquiry is negotiated between the researcher, the participants and other key people involved in the process of data collection. The practical issues I raise here illuminate the strenuous process of qualitative data collection. The practical issues put the data collection in perspective.

6.1.1 My anxiety prior to fieldwork

Vulliamy *et al.,* (1990:22) pointed out that:

> Qualitative research methodologies are often viewed as posing particular problems of political acceptability, because they tend to probe sensitivities which can safely be avoided or buried in the apparent neutrality of numbers (Vulliamy *et al.,* 1990:22).

Vulliamy's statement reverberated in my mind when I was about to start negotiating access to the schools and participants in the study. By all means, the education sector is a political and contestable area; it is one of the yardsticks for measuring the success of political regimes. Public condemnation of the quality of education being provided by the state may be construed as covert condemnation of the government of the time.

There were a number of issues that bothered me while I planned for my field work. Some of these issues were caused by the negative publicity of the education sector in Malawi bordering on abuse of donor funds. The major allegation of abuse of funds involved a cabinet minister who had allegedly signed fraudulent contracts with several building contractors to construct school infrastructure. The amount of money that was lost in the scam was huge. The case was currently in court and a prominent official in the department of education was convicted and sentenced to prison. Another scam involved another former education minister and the supply of books in which K187 million was unaccounted for. This case is still being heard by a court of law. The other major issue that has been affecting the MoEST was to do with poor performance of pupils in the MSCE national results. For a number of years since the dawn of multiparty democracy in 1994, the number of candidates doing well at national examinations had dramatically gone down. There was also a public condemnation of the quality of education at both primary and secondary levels especially in government schools. This has been largely blamed on impromptu implementation of the FPE policy. The impromptu implementation of FPE became clear when the government recruited unqualified teachers to take up teaching positions in primary school as a result of the large numbers which enrolled in the first year of the inception of the policy.

I must point out that I planned to go to Malawi for the empirical study a year after a change of government leadership. Although the incumbent, Bingu Mutharika, had previously belonged to the United Democratic Front (UDF), a party of former president, Bakili Muluzi, he decided to leave the party and form his own party called the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Most of the alleged financial embezzlements within the MoEST had happened in the Muluzi era. The Muluzi regime was not very receptive to criticisms in education. For instance, it was rumoured that the government meddled with a course that was offered in the University of Malawi because it was perceived to be critical of some of the educational policies that the government was implementing.

The other issue that bothered me was that the youth in Malawi have been instrumental in questioning policies or actions that government and education institutions make. Now and

again, students in colleges have protested against their own conditions. For instance, there was a protest in 2004 which was instigated by fourth year student teachers at one of the constituent colleges of the University of Malawi. The students protested that they had to proceed for teaching practice immediately after the end of the semester while the college administration were said to have wanted them to wait longer so that they could conduct teaching practice at the beginning of another school term. This meant that this cohort of student teachers would not graduate the same year they finished course work. Student teachers were understood to be unhappy with that and protested vehemently leading to closure of the college. I thought that some people would misconstrue my research as a forum of protest against the failures of the educational system and subsequently, the broader political system because it would involve some of the students from one of the teacher education colleges.

Teaching practice is conducted in the third term which is the final term of the secondary school calendar. During this term, there are two national examinations taking place in schools, namely, Junior Certificate Examinations (JCE) and MSCE. A number of teachers leave their secondary schools to invigilate these examinations. As such student teachers would be left with very few members of staffs in the school. Those teachers who remained in the school may be busy with assisting in the conduct of national examinations in schools and also taking over responsibilities from teachers who embark on invigilation duties.

There is a tendency to reduce teaching activities and concentrate on the examinations during this period. In schools where there are shortages of classroom space, teaching may have to be conducted outside classrooms and this disturbs teaching and learning. During the examinations period, school heads also tend to be quite busy. Head teachers tend to be busy with examinations and rarely find time to talk to student teachers. Student teachers may be left to take full responsibilities of teaching during this period. The third term is also critical for pupils in forms one and three as they work hard to move to examination forms of two and four respectively. At the same time student teachers were expected to conduct their lessons in forms one and three. I had to consider how this was going to affect student teachers' experiences as well as pupils in the secondary schools.

On another level, I had to consider the bilateral relations that existed between Great Britain and Malawi as a potential source of anxiety in the study. Politically, Malawi was a former British colony. The country continues to enjoy good relations with Britain to the extent that Britain is the largest single donor to Malawi. I was studying at a university in Britain and had

to do empirical data collection in Malawi. I felt that some individuals in Malawi, especially the ruling politicians would not be entirely pleased with my study whose results would be presented in England. I thought that this would be the case because I would be seen to be highlighting 'social problems' in education that politicians may want to hide from donors especially where the donor had made tremendous investments in the education sector.

6.1.2 Negotiating and obtaining access

Vulliamy *et al.,* (1990:4) noted that:

> In research settings there tends to be a hierarchy of consent, whereby those in positions of power grant permission for research to be done on individuals lower down the hierarchy and this can lead to understandable resentment which can only be overcome by researchers' very careful management of their role (Vulliamy *et al.,* (1990:4).

I was not very sure what response I would get at the MoEST regarding carrying out research study in some schools. I had some hope that if I was given permission the next task would involve carefully managing my role with staff at Masambiro College to avoid any resentment referred to above. I had friends at Masambiro College who had attended university with me. However, they were not in positions of authority regarding my research. Even if they had been in authority, it would raise ethical issues if I approached them to grant me permission based on friendship. However, they were helpful in linking me up with personnel who were gate-keepers at the college. I had made contacts with one of my friends and he briefed me on issues regarding the operations of the college and the calendar of teaching practice. I found out the time the college opens, the time it closes, the time scheduled for teaching practice, and the contact persons for teaching practice. I thought the information he provided was very useful.

6.1.3 Meeting officials in the MoEST

I arrived in Malawi towards the end of July 2005 and started making arrangements with officials at MoEST to hold a meeting with the director of education. There is some subtlety about meeting figures of authority in Malawi. Whereas the formal way of operation governs most bureaucratic operations, it may be necessary at some stage to use 'strings' as it were, to get to the senior personnel in most organizations quickly. This is the case because bureaucratic routes can be painstakingly slow in some cases. Sometimes people get things done quickly if they know someone in an organisation, who knows someone, who also knows someone up the organizational hierarchy. In a sense, the traditional cultural practices infiltrate some bureaucratic organizational culture. I had to play by the rule of thumb to meet the person who was responsible for granting permission to researchers in education. I had two friends who were working in the MoEST Headquarters. They were closer to the director

and were able to talk to his secretary to book an appointment. Even though the director was about to go for another meeting at the time I arrived, he allowed me to discuss my research study with him.

Researchers will need to ensure that not only 'access is permitted, but in fact, is practicable' (Cohen *et al.,* 2000: 98). Access to sensitive areas might not only be difficult but problematical both legally and administratively. Researchers may also have problems gaining access from potential participants for practical reasons, e.g. time or potential participants have something to protect (Cohen *et al.,* 2000). The issue of access requires that researchers plan their research well to prevent any difficulties with being granted access to participants and the setting of the study. It would be advisable to do some initial intelligence, as it were, on the topic that one intends to investigate to see if there are any issues that may inhibit potential participants from taking part, say, because the topic is too sensitive, too demanding or is in conflict with professional ethics. Additionally, the methods of data collection should be those that potential participants could easily cope with, without consuming most of their time and causing undue strain.

Bell (1999) pointed out that some institutions insist that all requests from researchers wishing to carry out a research project must be agreed by a senior officer. I went to see the director of educational planning at the MoEST Headquarters. I presented my case to him and as I had feared, he was not immediately ready to allow me to go ahead with my study. It is obvious that research conducted in schools with teachers and pupils can be sensitive depending on the issues one is trying to examine. The director noted that he was unwilling to allow individuals who were not teachers themselves to conduct research that would involve observing lessons in classrooms. I indicated to him that I was a qualified teacher and had taught in secondary school for a period of one year. I added that I also had some experience in training teachers at tertiary level. I was respectful during my discussion with the director in keeping with African values. Showing respect and being polite to people in authority and elders is highly valued in most African societies (Vulliamy *et al.,* 1990). He then allowed me to meet the principal of Masambiro College.

I asked him if he was going to write a letter which I could take to the principal of Masambiro College to demonstrate that I had been granted permission to carry out the research study. As I have already noted, some formal operations sometimes are not given much attention. The word of mouth is sometimes as equally valued in formal organizations. This could be looked at as a legacy of the traditional African oral culture where the word of mouth was very

important. This appears to be very different from the practices in the western world where a lot of paperwork is involved to prove that a researcher has been granted permission to carry out a research study. The director told me he was going to make a phone call to the principal of Masambiro College to let him know that he had approved my study.

6.1.4 Meeting officials at Masambiro College

I arrived at Masambiro College and met a friend who had briefed me on a number of things about activities and operation of the college. Just like my friends at the MoEST, he took me to the principal's office. He helped me talk to the principal's secretary on what I had come for. I was polite and respectful when discussing my research study with the principal and other members of Masambiro College I met (Vulliamy *et al.,* 1990).

I told him I had sought permission from the director of education who had allowed me to approach the principal of the college. I asked him if the director had called because he had told me he was going to call to alert him of my impending visit and that I had been permitted to carry out the study. He told me the director had not called; nevertheless he trusted that I had been granted permission. The principal then invited his deputy to the office and I had some discussion in relation to the study with the deputy principal. The deputy principal further referred me to the teaching practice coordinator for more discussions.

The teaching practice coordinator recommended that my name be added onto the list of the college supervisors. This meant that I was going to conduct empirical data collection as one of the teaching practice supervisors even though I would not be assuming any supervisory role. I felt this was going to cause some problems because student teachers might treat me like a supervisor. There was an issue of power associated with supervisors. The position that I was going to assume was going to accord me undue powers which, I thought, would affect the relationship of the researcher and student teachers. While I accepted to be part of the supervising team, I made sure that I would let student teachers know my role of a researcher as I observed and interviewed some of them. I had to make this clear so that student teachers treated me for who I was and also to make sure that I was not carrying out the research data collection through dishonest means. I also had to tell student teachers that my observations and interviews would not be seen by the college supervisors. From an ethical view point, I made sure I did not disguise myself and made my position clear to research participants.

The teaching practice coordinator noted that I was interested in conducting empirical data collection in the central region and therefore I was supposed to be dealing with the teaching practice coordinator for central region. The coordinator for the central zone was around and

we managed to cover a lot of ground discussing how I was best going to meet the student teachers. He also gave me a list that showed how the student teachers had been distributed to various secondary schools in central Malawi. I told him I was going to select secondary schools where there were a good number of student teachers. I also told him that apart from going to a number of schools, I would select two schools for extensive visits. One school would be for third year cohorts of student teachers and the other school would be for second year cohorts of student teachers. This was in line with a cross-case research study which I had planned to conduct.

6.1.5 Meeting student teachers

I introduced myself to student teachers when I arrived at the selected secondary schools. Most of them were very keen to be involved in the study. They had already been told by the teaching practice coordinator that I would be going round some selected secondary schools. Some of them clearly expressed that my research study offered them an opportunity to gain some practical knowledge and skills on how to conduct data collection. Others indicated that at some stage they would be applying to pursue a degree programme in education in which they would be expected to conduct some research. These student teachers felt that their involvement in my study was helpful for them as well to gain some practical skills and knowledge of conducting research studies. I was generally pleased with this.

In **Table 6.1** below, I outline the schedule for my fieldwork. The schedule includes the meetings that I had with personnel in the MoEST and Masambiro College. In addition, the schedule outlines the visits I made to schools.

Period 2005/2006	Activity	Where
July	Trip to Malawi	
July 24-30	Meet MoEST officials	Lilongwe
July 30-August 6	Meet with principal, teaching practice coordinator	Masambiro College
August 8-20	Pilot and refine research tools	Bunda College
September	Collect data/transcribe/partial analysis	Secondary schools, Bunda College
October	Collect data/transcribing/partial analysis	Secondary schools, Bunda College
November	Collect data/transcribing/partial analysis	Secondary schools, Bunda College
December	Transcribe/analyse/in-depth interviews	Bunda College
January	Transcribe data, literature review	Bunda College
February	In depth interviews	Masambiro College
March	Transcription and data analysis	Bunda College
March	Trip to UK	

Table 6.1: Schedule for empirical data collection

6.2 Data collection procedures

Data is defined as 'bits and pieces of information found in the environment' (Merriam 1998: 70) that are 'collected in systematic ways to provide an evidential base from which to make interpretations and statements intended to advance knowledge and understanding concerning a research question or problem' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004: 172). Activity theory and qualitative inquiry rely on the collection of data specific to an activity as it is 'stretched over the social and situational contexts' (Spillane *et al.,* 1999: 7). In particular, qualitative research emphasises collecting data in specific settings that exhibit features of the phenomenon under study. This mutuality between activity theory and qualitative research was necessary and helpful in the smooth data collection procedures in this study.

There appears to be no clear step-by-step method to carrying out activity theory research in practice. The collective unit of analysis in the research study was teaching practice; the emphasis in the study was on the experiences in the activity system where student teachers were the primary participants. In this study, data collection procedures were influenced by activity theory and qualitative inquiry. The tools selected for data collection were semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, classroom non-participant observations and participant' critical incident logs. These tools help to answer the research questions in this qualitative inquiry couched within an activity theory framework. Nardi (1996) noted that in a study couched within an activity theory framework, a number of varied techniques such as interviews, observations (Bodker, 1996), video, and historical materials (Nardi, 1996) should be used to collect data. Engeström (1993) put it that studies using activity theory could focus on searching internal contradictions in the activity system (see **Table 6.2**).

Engeström (1993)	Nardi (1996)	Bodker (1996)
Making the collective activity system as the unit of analysis	Pay attention to broad patterns of activity rather than narrow episodic ones that fail to reveal the overall direction and import of an activity.	The observation in the study focuses on breakdowns and changes in focus caused by shifts in focus or activity.
Searching for internal contradictions as the driving force behind disturbances, innovations, and change in the activity system	Use varied sets of data collection techniques including interviews, observations, video, and historical materials without undue reliance on any one method	

Table 6.2: Practical approaches to activity theory-oriented research

Sources: Engeström (1993); Nardi (1996); Bodker (1999)

Table 6.2 above portrays approaches to data collection in research driven by an activity theory framework. These were the approaches from which I selected data gathering tools in this research study. In this study, I felt that experiences and views during teaching practice and their inherent nature, cause, influence and outcome could best be examined using interviews, observations, and incident critical logs. Qualitative studies tend to combine data collection tools, i.e. observation and interviewing etc, because a researcher has several research questions to answer, as well as the researcher wants to use different methods or sources of data collection to corroborate each other. This approach whereby a number of techniques are used to collate data is viewed as methodological triangulation (Mason, 1996).

Data instrument/ school	Limbani (4 student teachers)	Gawani (6 student teachers)	Namate (7 student teachers)	Mapone (5 student teachers)
Semi-structured interview	Four visits to four student teachers	Two visits to two student teachers Four visits to four student teachers	Two visits to student teachers	Two visits to student teachers
Critical incident log	Weekly logs for six weeks	Weekly logs for 6 weeks with four student teachers		
Non-participant observation	Two observations for two student teachers	Two observations for two student teachers		
In-depth interviews		Two interview sessions with four student teachers		

Table 6.3: Details of data collection in schools

Table 6.3 above shows frequencies of meetings that took place between me and the student teachers at the four secondary schools. The table also shows how I used the critical incident logs with student teachers at Limbani and Gawani secondary schools. It is necessary to state that the main participants in the study were four third year student teachers at Limbani secondary school and four second year student teachers at Gawani secondary school.

6.2.1 Interviews with student teachers

Interviews were the main source of data in the study. The purpose of the interviews was to explore experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. The questions touched on the setting of teaching practice, the actions of student teachers, the community in teaching practice, the resources for teaching practice, the mission for teaching, supervision, and other pertinent issues during teaching practice. These elements all fall within activity system of teaching practice. The interviews generated data in form of notes, brief phrases and full

paragraphs of texts. These were useful in understanding the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice from an activity theory perspective.

The current study adopted semi-structured interviews. This allowed me to probe some responses in the course of the interview sessions. There are many advantages of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview may have high validity in that people are able to talk about something in detail and depth. In addition, complex questions and issues can be clarified during semi-structured interview sessions. The interviewer can probe areas suggested by the respondent's answers, picking-up information that had either not occurred to the interviewer (http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf, 2007).

In addition, these interviews have been credited because they facilitate organisation and analysis of the data as such data is easier to organize unlike unstructured interview data (Patton, 1980). Face-to-face interviews have the advantage of providing both interviewer and interviewee with non-verbal cues which may promote the development of rapport between the two people involved (Heyl, 2001). Semi-structured interviews promote positive rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. The semi-structured interview is very simple, efficient and practical way of getting data about things that cannot be easily observed, such as feelings and emotions (Heyl, 2001).

There are limitations of semi-structured interviews. The drawback with face-to-face semi-structured interviews as was the case in the study is that they tend to be costly. I was involved in travelling to the interview location and this may be expensive in terms of time and money. I made sure I conducted interviews on specified days when all the student teachers were available. This made me to go to the schools and the college on fewer occasions. In terms of validity, the researcher has no real way of knowing if the respondent is lying. Equally, the respondents may not consciously lie but may have imperfect recall, or an interview can sometimes be a 'second chance' to do something; having been given the time to reflect on something they did, the respondent may try to make sense of their behaviour by rationalizing their actions (http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf, 2007). Their explanation for their behaviour, with hindsight, may be very different from what they actually felt at the time of experiencing a phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews also depend on the skill of the interviewer especially the ability to think of questions during the interview. The other limitation with semi-structured interview is that the interviewer may give out cues that guide respondent to give answers expected by the interviewer. Semi-structured interview is also blamed for being not very reliable at times. It may be difficult to exactly repeat a focused

interview. Respondents may be asked different questions. The depth of qualitative information may be difficult to analyse.

The interviews in this study included a list of pre-prepared questions. I devised a semi-structured interview schedule which I gave to student teachers at the beginning of teaching practice. I arranged with them that I would come again later to conduct interviews based on the interview schedule I had left with them. In addition, I gave student teachers research consent forms for them to sign and declare that they had understood the research they were going to be involved in. I also put it to student teachers that they had the right to withdraw from the data empirical research at any time they deemed it necessary (see **Appendix C** for a sample of student teachers' consent form).

Teaching practice can be tedious for student teachers and that student teachers would be supervised during teaching practice. I had to make sure that data collection did not interfere with the core purpose of teaching practice. I went to the schools and was able to conduct interviews with student teachers who expressed that they were not busy on the days I was in the school. What guided me were the time tables that student teachers gave me at the time I gave them the interview schedules. The interviews were conducted at the house (where student teachers were accommodated) or staffroom. I tape-recorded the interview sessions as I held them. There were two levels of interviews. In the first category, I interviewed student teachers at the four schools twice (see **Table 6.3**). These interviews were meant to elicit student teachers' perceptions of the teaching profession a teacher education programme on which they were enrolled.

The other level of interviews involved two secondary schools (Limbani and Gawani secondary schools) where I intensively interviewed four second year and four third year student teachers on a number of issues regarding their experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. I kept going to the schools and was able to raise some questions with the student teachers I had interviewed earlier. This was a way for cross-checking and clarifying some of the points which arose during earlier interviews. I found this approach to be very useful as it helped me get some feedback from respondents on some issues that were forming in the data transcripts and initial analyses. I also conducted in-depth interviews with four student teachers (second year cohort) at the end of teaching practice. These student teachers had conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school. By the time the interviews were conducted, they had started the third year of their teacher education programme. These interviews were meant to probe, clarify and fill in some gaps in the data that had been

generated from the earlier interviews, observations and critical incident logs. These in-depth interviews were conducted with some student teachers from the initial group of participants. I conducted the in-depth interviews at the college where the participants were studying. I used an office to conduct the interviews. I made sure that the interviewee relaxed before I could start asking questions. I started by talking about general issues and what the student teacher had been doing over the vacation (see **Appendix K** for a sample of in-depth interview schedules for student teachers).

6.2.2 Interviews with coordinator and supervisors

The purpose of interviewing a coordinator of teaching practice and some of the supervisors was to explore their experiences during supervision as well as what they thought of the experiences of student teachers on teaching practice. The form of interviews for supervisors and the coordinator was semi-structured. The questions for the coordinator and supervisors touched on how they viewed teaching practice based on what they observed about student teachers' experiences.

I carried out interviews with a teaching practice coordinator and supervisors on teaching practice. I handed out interview schedules to some supervisors and the coordinator. I asked supervisors and the coordinator to have a look at the questions on the interview schedule and consider some responses when they go around observing student teachers. I pointed out to them that I would come back to have some interview sessions with them. They indicated that they would sketch some answers to the questions which we could explore during the interviews. I thanked them for expressing the willingness to be involved in the study. Later, I was able to speak with them around the issues of teaching practice that I had raised in the interview schedules. Some supervisors decided to give me written responses to the questions because they had to travel back to the college at short notice. The interviews with a coordinator and supervisors generated both brief phrases and full paragraphs of texts (see **Appendix D** and **Appendix E** for samples of interview schedules for teaching practice coordinator and supervisors).

6.2.3 Non-participant observation

Methodological discussions about the role of observation as a research method have been central to the history of qualitative research (Flick, 2002). Observation is one of the oldest and most frequently employed techniques for collecting data in the field of educational and social research. It is also employed in the framework of quantitative research. Observation assumes the presence of the observer in a particular situation and collecting data about the

happening in the setting under study. The crucial research instrument is the observer, who collects data mostly by means of his or her sight (Sarantakos, 2005), but also by means of other senses. In comparison with the other techniques of collecting data, the main advantages of the observation technique are that it allows direct collecting data since the observer participates in the situation under study; that data are collected in the natural setting; it permits the observer to acquire data which cannot be obtained with other techniques; it allows to verify the validity of responses since by observing the situation, one can find out whether people do as they say (Bryman, 2004).

Observation stresses that practices are only accessible through observing them. Interviews on the other hand merely make the accounts of practices accessible instead of the practices themselves (Flick, 2002). Observation is praised for enabling the researcher to find out how something factually works or occurs (Flick, 2002). Interview presentations only 'comprise mixtures of how something is and how something should be, which still needs to be untangled' (Flick, 2002:134). To untangle it, observation is needed.

Many researchers use observations together with interviews to cross-check issues under study as well as to capture data that can otherwise not be collected through interviews. Cohen *et al.*, (2000) noted that observational data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from live situations. In this instance, the researcher is given the opportunity 'to look at what is happening *in situ* rather than as second hand' (Patton, 1990: 203-205). According to Morrison (1993) observations enable researchers to gather data on the physical setting, the human setting, the interactional setting, and the programme setting. Patton (1990) pointed out that observations enables researchers to understand the context of the programmes, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations and to move beyond perception-based data, and to access personal knowledge.

In this study I conducted non-participant classroom observation of some lessons taught by some of the key participants at Gawani and Limbani secondary schools by observing some lessons using a loosely structured observation protocol. The loosely structured observation protocol had a list of key aspects that I was interested in. The aspects of interest were lesson beginning, questions and answers, explanations, lesson aims, transition between stages, lesson planning, managing pupils, lesson ending, and general observation comments. I also used pre-observation briefing and post-observation interviews. The pre-observation briefing

was used to inform the participants the purpose of the observation, while the post-observation interview was done to explore the participant's views and clarify the lesson that I had observed. The observation aimed to provide support to the data generated by interviews and critical incident log entries. I produced a descriptive account as a result of watching and listening to student teacher's lesson sessions (see **Appendix I** and **Appendix K** for samples of pre-observation and post-observation questions and observation protocol).

6.2.4 Participants' critical incidents logs

One notable way of investigating the activity people do is to ask them to describe what *critical incidents* occurred over a specified period of time (Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident technique was an attempt to identify the more 'noteworthy' aspects of people's behaviour and was based on the assumption that teaching practice was composed of critical and non-critical tasks. Oxtoby (1979: 239) defined 'critical incident as one that makes the difference between success and failure in carrying out important parts of the activity that one is performing'. Oxtoby (ibid) has argued that critical incident score over the use of diaries in that they are centred on specific happenings and on what is judged to be effective behaviour from subjects.

As student teachers undergo teaching practice, there could be critical incidents that they juggle with in their daily lives. Obstacles in the activity of teaching practice were helpful in explaining how student teachers experienced teaching practice. Eight student teachers (four in second and four in third year) at the Limbani and Gawani secondary school were given critical incident logs in which to record critical events in their daily teaching practice lives. The critical incident logs were meant to be filled in during the entire period of teaching practice. They were meant to be filled in on a weekly basis. Instructions on what to record were given to participants so that they concentrate only on issues that addressed critical incidents relevant to the study. The focus was on supervision, classroom, and socio-professional critical incidents. These critical incident logs provided structured entries of free-flowing texts. These also provided private personal accounts of experiences in student teachers' own words (see **Appendix F** for a sample of critical incident log tool).

6.2.5 Field notes

Impressions and insight that I, as a researcher, make during data collection can best be recorded as field notes. I took notes during the observation visits and interview visits to schools, recording interesting issues and impressions. Immediately following each contact

with a participant, I wrote out comments regarding any problems with data collection as well as general observations about the process of data collection.

My field notes contained consistent information about the visits to the schools, the observations, the interviews that I made, who was present, the physical setting, social interactions, and what activities took place. The field notes included my insights, interpretations, beginning analyses about what was happening in the setting and what they might mean. These notes were intended to supplement the observational notes, critical incident log data and interview scripts. The field notes were valuable in capturing nuances in the observation and interview settings.

6.2.6 Documentary data

In activity theory, documents are artifacts that relate to the activity under inquiry. Weiss (1998) noted that documents are 'a good place to search for answers as they provide a useful check on information gathered in an interview' (p. 260). Weiss (1998) further noted that when other techniques fail to resolve a question, documentary evidence can provide a convincing answer. Hammersley and Atkinson (1985) stressed that 'it would be hard to conceive of anything approaching ethnographic account without some attention to documentary material in use' (p.156).

I relied on some documents to provide me with secondary data. I had to ask for the prospectus of Masambiro College. This provided me with background information about the college, secondary schools and the teaching practice activity. I also got hold of the teaching practice handbook which every student teacher was supposed to have during teaching practice. This provided me with pertinent information on the responsibilities of all the key people involved in teaching practice as well as the objectives of teaching practice. The handbook also provided me with information regarding the way supervision for various subjects were conducted. I trusted that the information was quite useful for me in understanding prior issues surrounding teaching practice.

6.3 Reflexive account of data collection

The issues I raise in this section pertain to the reflexive account of data collection in the study. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) encourage qualitative researchers to develop a practical and visible process of reflexivity. In this process, an understanding of the self in relation to the research and an accounting for one's research choices are recommended. Reflexivity also focuses on the implications of researchers' epistemological positions on their analytic and

interpretive approaches to conducting research and conveying findings (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

The first aspect I had to deal with was the use of English as a language for data collection. All the data instruments in the current study were framed in English. English is the language used for teacher education and business communication in Malawi. All teachers are expected to teach through the medium of English in the secondary school, except in African language subject such as Chichewa. I mentioned to them that they were free to use local languages when they felt it was fine for them. This was necessitated by an awareness that most Malawians with an MSCE tend to have better writing skills of English than oral English skills. This is mainly due to an inherent culture where people normally communicate in local languages both in class and outside classrooms. This affects the development of oral competence in English language. However, they all tried their best to speak in English. It would appear that each and every student teacher wanted to prove that they were competent in English. My informed view as a former secondary school English teacher and currently a teacher educator was that their level of spoken English was good and communicated their thoughts and views very well.

Among Masambiro College student teachers, I was a teacher educator with the University of Malawi and this had consequences in terms of power relations. The University of Malawi is normally rated higher in terms of status because of the nature of programmes it offers. The University of Malawi offers degree, masters and doctoral programmes. On the other hand, Masambiro College only offers a diploma programme. The other factor which contributes to the higher status of the University of Malawi where I work is that the selection to the University of Malawi is a tight one. Many students qualify for university places but only a small number of them are selected due to bed space (see **Section 1.7.4**). This means that the student teachers who are selected tend to be regarded as exceptional compared to those who may end up being selected to Masambiro College. It is necessary to mention that most of the students who get selected to Masambiro College may have also qualified for the University of Malawi if only there were enough bed space. These factors may affect power relations between the researcher and the researched and could consequently affect the quality of data one might collect.

In terms of power relationships and rapport building, I was especially able to quickly build rapport with the three male student teachers at Gawani secondary school during our first meeting. I used my teacher educator knowledge, skills and attitudes for productive

interactions in the process of data collection. It would appear that male student teachers identified with me easily because I was male researcher. However, it took time to build rapport with female student teachers at Limbani Secondary school. Our research relationships remained very formal and this could be viewed a limitation because some people do not feel very free to express themselves in very formal situations. I suspect the difficulty of building quick rapport with female student teachers may have been more due to cultural reasons than emanating from my position as a researcher. I suspect that talking to a female researcher rather than a man, would have been easier for the female student teachers in bridging power relations (see Dunne and Leach, 2005). However, I was pleased that I also managed to elicit as much data as possible from female student teachers. The female student teachers were able to take part in interviews, observations and also managed to respond to critical incident logs.

The assumptions that one may bring to any research situation may impede the ability to make progress in journeys of gaining knowledge. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that as a researcher, I must be aware of any recognized and unrecognized assumptions so that they do not interfere with my ability to interpret a situation or an experience systematically and analytically. My identity as a researcher should be the underlying philosophy during data collection. Patton (2002), while discussing assumptions of researchers in qualitative research, provided some advice that researchers must heed, cautioning that in order for the researcher not to become part of the problem I must not assume that I 'have all of the questions, much less all of the answers right' (p. 337). I would like to state that my seven years of exposure to teacher education, firstly as a student teacher during my teacher education programme (bachelor of education); secondly, my one year secondary school teaching, and some three years as a teacher educator, inevitably exposed me to some assumptions about teaching practice. These assumptions in the education system and classroom inevitably are sources of researcher subjectivity. To limit the influence of my assumptions on the research, the data collection process involved rigorous methods and standards for compiling meticulous notes that recorded events or ideas as data. The participants in this study were given a chance to cross-check the data to ensure that 'bias, unreliability, irrationality' resulting from my assumptions did not creep in. The participant-check was particularly done to make sure that the data spoke for the participants in the way they had wanted. I only had to interpret accounts, events, and views as presented to me as a researcher by the participants without any deliberate manipulation to suit my conscious or unconscious agenda.

Teaching practice tend to be a very stressful time for student teachers especially those in the third year due to the assessment that goes with it. Student teachers in the third year are

allocated grades by college supervisors in course of observing them. The grade which they are given contributes to their overall performance on the diploma programme. This suggests that third year student teachers may find teaching practice to be very demanding to meet college grading requirements. For second year student teachers, the grade that they get during teaching practice does not contribute to their overall course work performance. As a result, the level of stress for them may be lower. However, the fact that they are in school for the first time may suggest that they may still get some stress from teaching practice. The demand that teaching practice placed on them could have some effects on the research. It was important to make sure that research participants did not give their 'frustrations' or 'stress' for data.

To limit the effect of my research on the already existing demands of teaching practice on student teachers, I made it clear to them that I would not assuming any supervisory role during my visit to schools. I hoped that this could ensure that they behaved as normal as possible during lesson observations or during interview sessions. I also reminded student teachers that they had a right to postpone interview or observation sessions if they felt pressured by other requirements of teaching practice. I also mentioned to student teachers that I would not share the data I was collecting with college lecturers from Masambiro College. I suggested to them that they could feel free with what to say when with me.

The demand for accessibility to the researcher and the travel difficulties were all considered in the sample selection. Student teachers were spread across the three regions of Malawi for teaching practice. However, for empirical data collection, I selected central region of Malawi where my work place is located. In central Malawi, the sample was drawn from secondary schools with easy road access. In addition, I selected secondary schools which were not very far from my place of work. I made a strategic decision to focus on student teachers without any previous experience in teaching. I only selected student teachers who had completed MSCE and enrolled on teacher education after completing secondary education for extensive data collection. I hoped that these student teachers would offer a better understanding of first time experiences of teaching practice.

6.4 Data management

There were three main sources of data that were collected and analyzed in this study. These were interview data, critical incident log data and observed data. Additional data was gathered from relevant documents. Data from interviews was transcribed and typed to facilitate storage and analysis. Critical incident log data was also typed and stored. Observed

data was transcribed, typed and stored. The entire data transcripts were printed and also stored on a memory stick and computer hard drive. Data from each school was kept under the same file name. I took photos of some classes that I observed and stored them together. The actions that I took ensured that the data was safe and properly stored for analysis.

6.5 Analysing data

Data analysis is the 'process of organizing pieces of data systematically identifying their key features or relationships (themes, concepts, beliefs, and e.t.c.) and interpreting them' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004: 266). According to Schwandt (1997) interpretation processes generally answer questions such as 'what's going on here?', 'what does it all mean?' and 'what is to be made of it all?' (p. 4). This process is grounded in the theory used to frame the study and is directly related to research questions. In this study the theory within which the study was couched was activity theory. The research questions were specifically formulated to elicit answers that were related to activity theory while adhering to qualitative research paradigm. It is important to illuminate qualitative data analysis before I discuss the procedure for data analysis in this research study.

6.5.1 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data analysis provides ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes from data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Meaningfulness is determined by the particular objectives of the research study. Qualitative approaches to data analysis tend to focus on the descriptive or theoretical aspects of the transcript data. One of the unique features of qualitative analysis is that it deals in words and is guided by fewer universal rules and standardized procedures than statistical analysis in quantitative analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1994):

> There are few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 35).

This relative lack of universal rules and standardized procedures is said to be a source of versatility and the focus of considerable misunderstanding among researchers. The fact that qualitative analysis does not specify uniform procedures to follow draws critical condemnation from some quantitative researchers who question whether analysis can be truly rigorous in the absence of such universal criteria (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In fact, qualitative studies may have helped to invite this criticism by failing to adequately articulate the standards for assessing qualitative analyses. In addition, data analysis in qualitative

inquiry is a mixture of inductive and deductive processes. Inductive analysis occurs in the beginning stages, when the researcher discovers by being open to the data, patterns, themes, and categories in the data (Patton, 2002). Deductive analysis takes place in the final stages of the analysis when the researcher is concerned with testing and affirming the authenticity and appropriates of the inductive analysis (Patton, 2002). Both inductive and deductive strategies of analysis were used in the study.

In qualitative research data analysis is not in temporal discrete stages: as soon as the first pieces of data are collected, the researcher begins the process of making sense of the information and the different processes involved in qualitative analysis also overlap in time (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative analysis can be described as loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data, unearthing new connections, and developing more complex formulations along with a deepening understanding of the material (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This makes qualitative analysis to be fundamentally an iterative set of processes. The researcher often begins analysis through the coding of data and familiarizes with all the material to be analyzed. During this process major categories or themes are identified and further analysis tries to locate themes within the text. The researcher then attempts to extract meaning from the text with reference to the thematic coding and the identified locations with the transcript. This iterative process means that coded material would be examined repeatedly as new themes and ideas emerge.

6.5.2 Linking activity theory and data analysis

In this section I look at the elements of activity theory framework as they were used in the analysis and discussion of research data in the study. In the process of data analysis, consideration was made of elements that form the activity systems of teaching practice.

According to an activity theory framework tools are said to mediate the interactions between the subject and the object (Bannon, 1997). The tools that were considered were those directly identified by me, through observations, interviews, critical incidents and documents during teaching practice. These included teaching and learning material that were critical for the activities of teaching practice. Other tools related to the academic training in college, such as psychological tools and pedagogical tools of teaching. The subjects were the individuals whose teaching practice was being examined and these were principally student teachers. The objects were the immediate motives of the activity that the subjects were involved in. The outcomes were described as the purposes of the actions as well as the purposes of the

stakeholders (Bannon, 1997). The other elements of the activity systems theory that were considered were the community, rules/norms, and the division of tasks.

According to Roth and Tobin, (2002) subjects engage in an activity that is embedded in a range of relations with other aspects in an activity systems triangle, such as community, rules/norms and the division of tasks. The activity system considers the community as those 'multiple individuals or subgroups, who share the same general object' (Roth and Tobin, 2002:114). In a secondary school, the community implied multiple teachers, administrators, support staff, pupils, student teachers, supervisors, cooperating teachers, etc. The rules/norms related to the explicit and implicit regulations and the general practice that governed actions, practices and interactions during teaching practice. As regards the division of tasks, this meant the role that each student teacher played in the pursuit of the object of teaching practice.

Merriam (1998) noted that, 'in order for a reader to vicariously experience a phenomenon, the writer must transport the reader to the setting' (p. 238). The setting was also looked at in the analysis. The nature of a setting, while not specifying the actions that take place, provides channels that encourage and discourage particular ways of thinking and acting (Grossman *et. al.*, 1999). Creswell (2002) suggested that the provision of a thick, rich description of setting in activity theory allows the readers to make individual determinations of transferability. Detailed descriptions of setting also allow the reader to understand the phenomenon under inquiry and draw interpretations about meanings and significance (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005).

Activity theory considers impediments within the performance on subjects in an activity as contradictions, clashes or dissonance (Roth and Tobin, 2002). Through activity theory, I tried to analyse some of the underlying contradictions that produce failures, disruptions or necessitate innovations to teaching practice. Contradictions manifested themselves as problems, ruptures, breakdowns, tensions and clashes (Engeström, 1999, Kuutti, 1996). Engeström (1999) noted that contradictions within an activity system are usually experienced as breakdowns that can only really be understood by studying the entire activity system. 'Actions in activity system are not fully predictable, rational, and machine-like; the most well planned and streamlined actions involve failures, disruptions, and unexpected innovation' (Engeström 1999: 32).

6.5.3 Categorical analysis

Bannon (1997) noted that a difficult aspect of using activity theory as a framework for analysis is that no clearly defined set of procedures for conducing activity theory research exists. It was up to me to decide which data analysis technique would be more meaningful in a qualitative research adopting the perspective of activity theory. To derive meaning from the data I used categorical analysis.

Categorical analysis involved the 'systematic organisation of data into groupings that were alike, similar or homogenous' (Rose and Sullivan, 1996: 232). Categorical analysis is an iterative process that aims to identify semantic and other kinds of relationship between data items and then identify logical relationships among categories of items in order to refine the number of categories to be used in the writing up the study (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). This approach involved developing codes for the data. This is one of the most prominent approaches used in analysing spoken and written text in qualitative teacher research (Fetterman, 1989; Lankshear and Knobel, 2004).

To make sense of the qualitative data collected in this study I focused on particular aspects of activity theory perspectives that guided the formulation of research questions in this research study. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted the necessity to reconsider the conceptual framework and research questions in light of data analysis. They pointed out that:

> …conceptual framework and research questions are the best defence against [data] overload. They also reflect a point that data collection is inescapably a selective process (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 55).

To analyse some of the perceptions of prospective secondary school teachers regarding the teaching activity, I relied on the following research questions:

(a)   What were the goals of student teachers for joining a secondary school teacher education programme?

(b)   What were the perceptions of student teachers regarding the teaching profession?

To analyse some of the relationships within and across activity settings in which student teachers carry out teaching practice, I relied on the following research questions:

(a)   How did activity systems within teaching practice influence the ways in which student teachers developed in teaching?

(b)   How did student teachers experience and think about activity settings of teaching practice?

(c) How did the conduct of teaching practice explain contradictions/tensions of student teachers in secondary schools?

To analyse some of the innovations that stakeholders proposed for the activity settings of teaching practice, I relied on the following research question:

(a) How did student teachers and supervisors envision teaching practice?

The overarching unit of general meanings that had to be elicited from the data was student teachers' experiences with activity theory as a guiding theory. The first step in analysis was deriving meaning from the collected data. This was accomplished by reading through transcripts and developing units of data, which were then sorted into groups that looked and felt alike. I did this while applying codes to the clusters of the data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994: 56):

> Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to 'chunks' of varying size-words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. metaphor) (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56).

I labelled the data clusters with a word or phrase for identification purposes, separated them into groups, and glued them on A3 papers. I then developed more elaborate categories of data with relevant meanings. This method continued until all the data were categorized into meaningful units. This process began during data collection and continued throughout the process. At the earlier stage, inductive analysis was the main approach to analysis. This approach allowed me to become familiar with the data and to anticipate possible areas to investigate further through in-depth interviews. It also assisted me in staying focused on the main purpose of the study. Later, as the themes were developed, I used deductive analysis whereby I tried to relate the themes that had emerged to the research questions and the activity theory perspectives that guided the research study.

This study was a cross-case study of third year and second year cohorts of student teachers at two secondary schools during teaching practice. The qualitative cross-case study as described by Patton (2002) enables the analysis and interpretation within and across different settings. This allowed the analysis and interpretation of 'comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each cases of interest' (Patton, 2002: 447). Patton (2002) noted that using a cross-case study allows for a 'coming to understand its activity within certain circumstances' (p. 295). Therefore, I first analyzed each cohort's data separately to gain an understanding of their experiences from a micro-level perspective. I then conducted a cross-case discussion 'to build a general explanation that fitted each of the two cohorts, even

though the cohorts varied in their details' (Merriam, 1998). This allowed me to gain a general understanding of teaching practice from different cohorts of student teachers placed at two secondary schools.

6.6 Reflexive account of data interpretation

At the level of analysis and interpretation, reflexivity implies that no observations, accounts from interview participants, document data, have an unequivocal or unproblematic relationship to anything outside the empirical material (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). For a reflexive researcher, empirical data in social science are not 'facts' in any straightforward sense but rather, the data emerging from a study are aspects of the empirical material worked up to serve as one of many arguments in favour of a particular interpretation. The reflexive researcher should acknowledge that any study highlights only certain claims about the most accurate way to understand the particular situations, experiences, conditions, processes, etc. (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). The position of the researcher in terms of the reality of the text and the researcher's values, norms, and institutional pressures form elements that affect the ways that texts are read, interviews are coded, and research participants' narratives are represented in the writing up of research data (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

The position of a researcher has also got to do with a theoretical lens within which a research study is couched. There are also practical issues which may influence interpretation and it is important for a reflexive researcher to acknowledge them. In this study, I discussed my epistemological position (see **Chapter Five**) which is constructivist and interpretive. I also discussed an activity theory framework (**Chapter Four**) and how it guided the analysis of data. In this section, I give a reflexive account on the practical issues of data analysis and interpretation. To make sense of the qualitative data collected in this study, I focused on particular aspects of activity theory in relation to the research questions.

As already mentioned in the previous section, categorical analysis was useful in organizing qualitative data into various clusters of meanings for interpretation. In relation to the three research questions in the study, the overarching units of general meanings elicited from the transcript data were:

    (a) Student teachers' perceptions of teaching and teacher education programme;

    (b) Experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. This was in relation to contexts of teaching practice, namely classroom context, socio-professional context and supervision context;

(c) Views of student teachers regarding innovations to teaching practice.

The interpretation processes generally answered questions such as 'what was going on in the data, what did it all mean, and what was to be made of it in relation to teaching practice.' This was accomplished by reading through data transcripts and developing meaningful units, which were then sorted into thematic categories that looked and felt alike.

In the case of the first research question in the current study, accounts that emerged in the transcripts constantly showed a divide between utilitarian and altruistic views for joining a teacher education programme. The process of interpretation also showed a divide between what could be conceptualized as positive and negative views of the teaching profession by student teachers. In addition, it was possible to undertake further analysis with the aim of exploring minor representations of the dichotomy of views by paying attention to additional meanings of clustered data. I managed to develop sub-categories for further analysis and interpretation. I tended to select salient quotes for use in the writing up of the findings while acknowledging that all pieces of data were important. I did this in the knowledge that I did not want the interpretation process to suffer from 'halo effects' (Cohen *et al.,* 2000). The findings in **Chapter Seven** represent the interpretation of data in relation to the first research question.

In the case of the second and the third research questions, the focus of interpretation was on experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. The bases of interpretations in these questions were three, namely; classroom context, socio-professional context and supervisory context. An additional dimension of the interpretation was on innovations to teaching practice. These aspects were connected conceptually to an activity theory framework. This was a painstaking and highly iterative process. I generated major categories by trawling through data transcripts for interpretation. On the basis of the major thematic categories on the key aspects of the research questions, I managed to analyse clusters of data further to generate sub-categories. The sub-categories were useful in interpreting specific and other related experiences of individual research participants during teaching practice at two selected secondary schools.

At the level of interpreting data on innovations to teaching practice, my focus was on perceptions of research participants in trying to reconceptualise teaching practice. It would appear that research participants relied on contradictions or tensions within an activity system of teaching practice to derive their notions of innovation. The notions which research participants provided in the data transcripts were analysed and thematic categories were

developed and interpreted. The findings in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** represent the interpretations of some of the experiences of research participants during teaching practice placements.

There were a number of issues which affected the process of data interpretation and thereby inevitably affecting the findings in the study. These issues are also discussed as limitations of the current study (see **Section 10.5**). In terms of data sources, I think that the absence of school teachers and pupils as informants was a limitation in the data collected and affected the interpretation process. Some of the interpretations regarding views of student teachers were not cross-checked by school teachers and pupils. However this research was aimed at understanding experiences of student teachers and to that effect, the study fulfilled its main purpose.

My assumptions as a researcher might also be sources of irrationality, bias and unreliability. The impact of my assumptions could affect the interpretation process. I attempted to minimize the effects of my assumptions by relying on a systematic and rigorous process of a qualitative research design. Indeed, there were issues which could make the interpretation biased such as a case where a researcher unconsciously 'goes native' or becomes part of those being researched. The potential for this to happen was ever present in the data interpretation process where I remembered my own experiences of teaching practice in 2000. However, I relied on critical judgement and systematic and analytical skills to keep my own experiences out of the data interpretation.

The issue of power relations between the researcher and the researched is another source of bias in a data collection process. This may affect an interpretation of data. Some respondents may provide inaccurate data that appeals to the researcher and when such data is interpreted, it does not reflect the actual experiences of research participants. However, I relied on my knowledge and skills as a teacher educator to bridge the power relations with research participants. I noted in another section (see **Section 6.3**) how it was problematic interviewing female participants.

Also, during semi-structured interviews, respondents might bring about data bias through imperfect recall. The researcher may also not know whether respondents are lying and that may be a source of bias if the data they provide is interpreted without verifying its trustworthiness. Non-participant observation may also be a source of bias through Hawthorne effect (Cohen *et al.,* 2000) whereby those being observed try harder to behave differently because they know they are part of a study. This may also be due to the pressure caused by

the presence of a researcher in classrooms. I attempted to minimize the Hawthorne effect by also asking research participants questions before and after the observation sessions.

In summary, this reflexive account of data interpretation provides a perspective of understanding the findings presented in the next three chapters. The findings provide accurate ways of understanding teaching practice within an activity theory perspective with particular reference to situations, experiences, conditions and processes of an initial teacher education programme. The reflexive account of interpretation helps to construct knowledge in relation to experiences of student teachers during teaching practice at Masambiro College in Malawi.

6.7 Conclusion

There were a number of issues that needed to be considered deeply before and during data collection and analysis. I considered the practical issues during data collection as well as the techniques and tools for data collection. I examined interview, observation, field notes, critical incident log techniques, document data and how each contributed to the pool of data that had to be analysed using categorical analysis while adhering to tenets of qualitative inquiry and activity theory. I mostly relied on interviews in the study, followed by critical incident logs and observations. In terms of data analysis, I had to link activity theory perspectives with research questions and brought in categorical analysis as the analytical tool. This provided a useful way of understanding experiences of student teachers during teaching practice.

In the next chapter I address research findings on perceptions of student teachers about teacher education and teaching.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESEARCH FINDINGS ON PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS

7.0 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore some of the critical experiences of student teachers during secondary school teaching practice using an activity theory framework. In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings on the research questions that revolved around the perceptions of student teachers of teacher education and teaching. The research questions were as follows:

(a)   What were the goals of student teachers for joining a secondary school teacher education programme?

(b)   What were the perceptions of student teachers regarding the teaching profession?

An activity theory is predicated on the assumption that individuals' frameworks for thinking are developed through historical, culturally-grounded beliefs and actions. An activity theory calls attention to the goals of development and the ways in which environments are structured to promote development towards those goals (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). In the case of student teachers in the study, the central concern was to understand the kinds of culturally defined futures that influenced them to join a teacher education/teaching as well as their general perceptions of the teaching profession. The literature in **Chapter Three** unveiled some of the international discourse on perceptions of teachers regarding teacher education and teaching.

The student teachers who provided data for the first research objective above were conducting teaching practice at four secondary schools (see **Table 5.1**). The findings in the study were not very different from the international discourse. The findings are presented and discussed in the next sections.

7.1 Utilitarian goals for joining a secondary teacher education programme

As discussed in relation to activity theory (see **Chapter Four**), the goals of subjects in an activity may illuminate the outcomes that the subjects hope to accomplish in the short and long term (Waite, 2003). Waite (ibid) noted that through joining a professional activity, subjects may strive to achieve their idealistic visions by transforming the social and material

world that surrounds them. Utilitarian reasons for enrolling on a teacher education programme referred to the practical usage which the student teachers would gain personally from teaching (Lortie, 1975). This can be related to both extrinsic and job-related factors (see Chuene *et al.,* 1999) in **Section 3.1**.

The utilitarian views seemed to vary considerably among student teachers and the variation can be categorized as follows:

(a) A secondary school teacher education programme as a result of failure to pursue desired careers;

(b) A secondary school teacher education programme as a stepping stone to other careers;

(c) A secondary school teacher education programme as a means to upgrade teaching qualifications. These categories are fully developed in the next sections.

7.1.1 Secondary teacher education programme due to failure to pursue desired careers

There were some student teachers in the study who said they joined a teacher education programme because they had failed to make it to the university to study other courses they had desired. They used their enrollment on teacher education programme to replace their desired careers which they had failed to enroll on.

One manifestation of this was the following:

> *I joined the programme because the programmes I wanted to venture in at first proved futile. Initially, I wanted to become a public administrator but due to limited places in our University of Malawi and lack of funds, I ended up joining teaching profession. As of now, I do not regret joining teaching and I feel proud of myself that I am a teacher (year two male student teacher).*

Student teachers who aligned with the view above had failed to enroll on a desired course that was offered by the university. They also lacked funds to pay for tuition fees at private institutions to pursue the desired career. This suggested that the cost of educational programmes for desired courses at private institutions prevented some student teachers to take another route to achieve their career goals. Due to the impediments, some student teachers had to settle for courses that they had not initially thought of studying for. I also found a student teacher who embarked on teacher education programme even though it had not appealed to him, expressing delight with the teaching profession during the programme and promised to remain a teacher.

Another manifestation of this was from a student teacher who said:

> *I joined teaching as my last resort. I failed to realise my wishes in other fields I was aspiring. Now I think I should become a teacher because in the course of the training I am pursuing I*

have become to realise my potentialities and to like the profession (year two male student teacher).

According to this student teacher above, he had also failed to realise his wish of pursuing his desired career and ended up enrolling in teaching. However, after joining the teaching course, this student teacher developed a liking for teaching as he thought that he had potential to teach.

The student teachers quoted above demonstrated that some student teachers experienced a shift in their thinking after undergoing part of teacher education programme and wanted to remain in the teaching profession.

Yet another student teacher pointed out:

> *I joined the teacher education programme after being left out in the university intake. I had interest to continue with education and decided to join this teaching programme. Fortunately I was picked after writing aptitude test. I would love to become a teacher, contrary to what I had in mind before I joined. Firstly I was not much sure that I could manage to stand in front of pupils and teach. However, after going through part of teaching process I have noted that it is not all that difficult as I was thinking about it before (second year male student teacher).*

These findings demonstrated that some student teachers had tried to cope with the experience of failing to pursue their desired career by turning to teaching. They compensated their experience of failure by shifting to teacher education programme.

It can be suggested that some student teachers were left out by the university because they did not meet the entry requirements of their desired courses in the university. To an extent, this sheds some light on the findings that candidates who enroll on teacher education were, in some instances, weaker in their academic abilities to enter desired courses which were highly competitive.

According to Lockheed and Vespoor (1991), 75% of teacher candidates who had entered a teacher education programme in Liberia did so because they perceived no other option for a job. Equally, in Uganda and Botswana, teacher education was thought of being a functional activity (Nwagwu, 1981; Passi, 1990). Over half of Nigerian school leavers entering teacher education stated that teaching was the only job people can easily get (Nwagwu, 1991). In Uganda, student teachers stated that teaching was not a deliberate choice for them and that they had no love for the teaching profession. Other student teachers said that they had tried and failed to transfer to other faculties and were in teaching because they could see no alternative (Passi, 1990). In Botswana, some student teachers said they entered the profession because there were no other realistic options and teaching 'was a career of last resort' (Passi, 1990). It appears that for many teachers in the Sub-Saharan region, teaching was not the main activity in which they wanted to engage.

It was fascinating to note that some individuals who had not wanted to join teaching started to change their mindset gradually as they progressed on the teacher education programme and they appeared to derive some satisfaction from teaching. Activity theory calls attention to the ways in which environments promote development towards some goals. In the first place, the prospective teachers had different goals and the teacher education programme environment in the college seemed to mediate their thinking to an extent that some student teachers redirected their goals to teaching and made a virtue of teaching.

7.1.2 Secondary school teacher education as a stepping stone

Joining teaching as a stepping stone referred to the views by student teachers who thought that they joined the teacher education programme to move up the career ladder to a desired career at some stage in future. This view was different from the student teachers in the earlier case who thought that they joined teaching after failing to pursue a desired career. The difference was that the student teachers who subscribed to the thinking that teaching was a ladder to a desired career felt that teaching was only going to help them attain other careers that they desired. In this case teaching was used as a springboard.

Some student teachers noted that they joined the teacher education programme because it was going to act as a stepping stone for them to pursue either advanced qualifications in education that would take them out of the classroom or allow them to shift completely to another desired career. They hoped that after achieving the teaching qualification they would pursue advanced qualifications.

A student teacher said:

> *I joined the teaching programme because it looked like a step up the ladder to my career. If I discover that there are smaller benefits from the teaching profession, I may switch to other professions such as human resources management, accountancy, business administration (year two male student teacher).*

In this case, teaching was seen purely a ladder to career advancement. The student teacher's thinking seemed to be mediated by external reasons and not intrinsic factors associated with teaching (see Chuene *et al*., 1999). The student teacher further thought of extrinsic benefits form the teaching profession. The thinking in the student teacher seemed to suggest that teaching was only valuable extrinsically as also reported in Chuene, *et al*., (1999) study. This suggested that some individuals who joined teaching were not going to derive any satisfaction from teaching *per se*, but from the external benefits of teaching. Such individuals would be influenced by conditions which governed teaching in committing their lives to teaching.

Another student teacher thought teaching was not the main reason for joining a teacher education programme but rather a means to attain the desired career. The student teacher said:

> *I do not necessarily want to become a teacher but a medical doctor (year two male student teacher).*

In this case, the student teacher explicitly viewed teaching as a functional activity that would lead to a different profession at some stage in the future. There have been similar findings in many parts of the Sub-Saharan region where student teachers used teaching as a functional activity to achieve other desired goals (Nwagwu, 1981; Passi, 1990). In activity system, subjects may try to achieve their idealistic visions by transforming the social and material world that surrounds them (Waite, 2003). In the case of the student teachers who appeared to use the teacher education programme as a stepping stone, they might have been engaging in a professional activity with a view of placing themselves in a better position which would help them move closer or achieve their idealistic visions. Their enrollment on the teacher education programme could mediate their movement in the longer term towards their ultimate goals. After attaining the initial steps, the student teachers might have felt that they were moving towards their idealistic visions such as becoming a 'medical doctor'.

7.1.3 Secondary teacher education as a means to upgrade

'Joining secondary teaching as a means to upgrade' was relevant to student teachers who had previously taught in primary school sector. To them, secondary school teacher education was a form of in-service professional development. This was classified as utilitarian thinking because the student teachers who subscribed to it seemed to think of a secondary teaching qualification in job-related terms. This view seems to be similar to Chuene *et al.,* (1999) in relation to teachers in South Africa. Student teachers did not particularly seem to attach external values to teaching in secondary school as the reason for upgrading but rather they attached values of self improvement. This would benefit the self in terms of satisfaction, permanency in teaching, better salary and reduced workload. In doing so, they were aiming to transform their 'social worlds' that surrounded them. (It should be noted that primary school teachers in Malawi are normally trained at teacher training colleges where they are awarded certificates on successful completion of their training. They cannot teach in secondary school with that qualification even though the expansion of secondary education has seen some of them teaching in community secondary schools while still being paid primary school teachers' salaries).

Some student teachers who previously worked as primary school teachers thought that they joined the programme as a means to upgrade their qualifications. A student teacher said:

> *I want to become a secondary school teacher. I was once a primary teacher so I was not happy with my grade so I decided to upgrade through the programme (third year female student teacher).*

The student teacher felt unsatisfied with the primary school teaching grade and thought that she could become satisfied by enrolling on a secondary school teacher education programme. What appears to be the urge for the student teacher was attaining a secondary school teaching qualification. The student teacher did not seem to attach secondary school qualification with serving the nation as a secondary school teacher. The attainment of the secondary school teaching certificate seemed to be a means to an end for the individual.

Another student teacher said:

> *I wanted to establish permanency and recognition since I was allocated a secondary school to teach while I was a primary school teacher with a secondary school leaving certificate. So I wanted to become a permanent secondary school teacher (second year male student teacher).*

The case of the student teacher quoted above was fascinating. It demonstrated that some individuals were assigned to teach in primary school and secondary school even though they had no prior training in teaching at both levels. The individual thought that there was no permanency in such an arrangement. To try to attain some recognition as a teacher, the individual thought of enrolling on secondary school teacher education programme. The student teacher appeared to think in terms of being recognized and securing permanency in secondary school teaching by acquiring relevant teaching qualification.

It appears that primary school teachers assume lower professional status than secondary school teachers. In addition, unqualified teachers seemed to worry about their security within teaching and attempt to secure their positions by enrolling on relevant programmes. By acquiring a secondary school teaching qualification, permanency and recognition in secondary school teaching would be attained by the individual. This seemed to bring them at par with other qualified members of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) as well as becoming legitimate members of the activity system of secondary school teachers (Wertsch, 1981).

In addition, some student teachers viewed secondary school teaching as offering better working conditions as compared to primary school teaching. This was in terms of higher remuneration and reduced workload. As a result of these beliefs, they joined the secondary school teaching programme, which would guarantee them improved conditions of service.

One student teacher narrated:

As a serving primary school teacher, I joined the programme for better life after acquiring a certificate. This will be in terms of reduced working hours and better remuneration (year three male student teacher).

Another student teacher echoed:

I was not happy to be a primary school teacher; therefore, I wanted to become a secondary school teacher. Teaching in secondary school is more rewarding and easy work (year three female student teacher).

The images that secondary school teaching was better in terms of working conditions mediated the thinking of some student teachers to enroll on the secondary school teacher education programme. The attainment of a secondary school teaching qualification meant that they would experience the benefits of secondary school teaching such as better salaries and reduced workload. The issue of better salaries in secondary schools concurs with other research findings that primary school teaching in the Sub-Saharan Region is less paying and less satisfying (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002) as compared to secondary school teaching. The student teachers seemed to think that secondary school teaching was going to afford them better material welfare, and thus, transform their livelihood.

The findings from student teachers above compare favourably with other findings in the Sub-Saharan region. Chivore (1988) reported that the issue of salary was important in determining the attractiveness of the teaching profession in some parts of the Sub-Saharan Region. In Zimbabwe, for example, salary was ranked highest among the images that make teaching attractive (Chivore, 1988). It was assumed that moving up the hierarchy of teaching meant moving up the salary scale. It can be argued that joining secondary school teaching offered student teachers from a developing country better financial conditions as compared to primary school teaching.

In terms of activity theory, it would appear that the student teachers who appeared to think of secondary school teacher education as a means to upgrade were feeling that they had not yet achieved their visions while they were primary school teachers. They might have felt they were still lacking in some respects. They had to enroll on secondary school teacher education programme to strive to achieve their visions. After accomplishing the programme, they hoped that they would realize their idealistic visions. In addition, they seemed to notice a gap between their personal-self and the ideal-self and wanted to bridge it. They visualized the 'ideal-self' as more satisfactory because of better remuneration, higher professional status and reduced workload.

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Having explored utilitarian thinking among student teachers, I now move on to address the altruistic thinking among student teachers and how it influenced them to join the secondary school teacher education programme and the teaching profession.

7.2 Altruistic goals for joining a secondary teacher education

The altruistic thinking for joining a teaching programme is usually concerned with a personal commitment to ideas related to providing a service to society and commitment to national development (Grace, 1987). The international literature referred to in **Chapter Three** provided some interesting findings from Slovenia, America, Caribbean and United Kingdom about how the altruism mediated prospective teachers' thinking about teacher education and teaching (Brown, 1992; General Teaching Council, 2003; Kyriacou and Kobori, 1998; Young, 1995). In this case, people who think of teaching as their altruistic goal tend to think more of the society and the benefits that society would accrue as a result of their role as teachers.

Among the student teachers who took part in this study, some expressed that they wanted to become teachers for reasons that aligned with altruistic thinking. They expressed that teaching would help them provide a national service with the hope of contributing to the development of the country in the long run. Some student teachers expressed that they enrolled on a secondary school teacher education programme to help achieve some of the government's national aspirations. In a way, the student teachers seemed to conceptualize their social world (Waite, 2003) in a broader sense than those who conceptualized teaching within utilitarian goals.

7.2.1 Secondary teaching as a vocation

Teaching as a vocation refers to the thinking that there was a special urge for some people to join a teaching career. Some student teachers in the study attributed their decision to joining a secondary school teacher education programme to a life-long calling or vocation. These student teachers pointed out that teaching was the only profession they had wanted to pursue.

One student teacher articulated:

> *I wanted to become a teacher even before I joined teaching. I want to teach at secondary school and help my pupils (year three male student teacher).*

The student teacher thought that teaching was the only career that he had wanted to pursue in life because it would make him feel satisfied. This made him enroll on the secondary school teacher education programme. The student teacher thought that he was going to contribute to the welfare of pupils in his role as a secondary school teacher. Similarly, Nias (1989) found

that some teachers saw themselves as people with a strong concern for the welfare of others and wanted to improve the life chance of children by becoming teachers.

Another student teacher regarded teaching out of an obligation to the country. The obligation involved developing useful citizens. A student teacher commented:

> *I really want to become a teacher because that is the profession that I have always wanted to pursue. I joined the programme in order to take part in the government efforts of promoting quality education so that young Malawians are fully equipped to become useful citizens (year three male student teacher).*

The thinking by the student teacher above was similar with other research findings which show that education contributes to the development of social capital by increasing individual propensity to trust and tolerance. Balatti and Falk (2002) and Schuller *et al.,* (2002) showed that secondary school education as a social activity not only has a strong influence on the development of shared norms and values placed on tolerance and understanding within a community, but is also an important determinant of the building blocks of social capital; namely, building trust, extending and reconstructing social networks, and reinforcing behaviour and attitudes that influence community participation.

Another student teacher said that he joined a secondary school teacher education programme to help reduce the acute shortage of teachers. He remarked:

> *I had the desire to become a secondary school teacher. That is why I joined the secondary school teacher training programme. It touches me very much when I see the acute shortage of teachers in secondary schools. I do not want to be part of the problem (year three male student teacher).*

According to the student teacher above, teaching was held as an ideal vision because it would help transform the social world in which teachers live in the sense that after achieving the vision, the shortage of teachers would be ameliorated and pupils would be able to benefit from the services of the teacher. The social world of the pupils would be improved because they would be taught and could become useful citizens. The improvement of teacher shortage would contribute to the improved quality of secondary education. This would eventually contribute to national development through the building of social capital.

As noted earlier, the 'social world' of education in Malawi is marked by lower school enrolment rates in the Sub-Saharan region. The gross enrolment rates averaged about 65% in the early 1990s and repeaters occupied 15-20% of all primary school places. In 1996 about 120,000 pupils were in the final grade of primary schools and were competing for about 8000 new places in government secondary schools (Malawi Government, 2001b; World Bank, 2000). In 1994 the government adopted FPE policy designed to increase access to primary education and secondary education. FPE policy was an idealistic vision at a broader level that

the Malawi government was trying to use to transform Malawi. However, the vision remained untenable until there were teachers in the school to teach pupils. Student teachers who wanted to become teachers with a view of reducing shortage of teachers could be said to subscribe to a national developmental vision where education is a *sine quo non* for development (see World Bank, 2000).

7.2.2 Secondary teaching as a way to serve

The other conceptualization of altruistic thinking appeared in individuals who had initially not wanted to become teachers but seemed to start liking teaching after starting a teacher education programme and hoped to help educate the nation in the end. A student teacher said that he enrolled on secondary school teacher education programme to make a contribution towards education in Malawi. However, the student teacher noted that teaching was not the ultimate idealistic vision that he had wanted to achieve to transform his 'personal world' in the first place. According to Cole (1985) even those student teachers who reluctantly drift into teaching attribute their thinking to being mediated by the role of education in national development.

A student teacher noted:

> *At first I did not want to become a teacher but now I have started liking the profession, so I want to become a teacher and help in educating the Malawi nation (year two male student teacher).*

This demonstrated that some student teachers perceived teaching as important for national development even though they had not wanted to become teachers in the first instance. Their idealistic visions of teaching were couched within making a service to the nation. This provided evidence that individual's perceptions of teaching could change in course of undergoing teacher education programme.

I noted that a small number of student teachers thought of enrolling on the secondary school teacher education programme for altruistic reasons in the study. While I appreciated that there were few student teachers involved in the study, I thought that this supported Yong's (1995) claim that the predominant idealistic visions that mediate the thinking of prospective teachers to join a teaching programme in the developing world tend to be mainly utilitarian and not altruistic. This might be attributed to other factors such as poverty (see UNDP, 2004). It appears that high level of poverty may make some people to think more in terms of improving their own well-being first before they think in the broader national sense.

Having explored some of the visions of student teachers for joining a secondary school teacher education, I now move to explore the general perceptions that student teachers held of the teaching activity.

7.3 Student teachers' perceptions of the teaching profession

As noted in **Chapter Three**, the need to consider issues around prospective teachers' perceptions about teaching is overwhelming. It is believed that subjects' perceptions of a professional activity of teaching may influence their morale and dedication to the profession. The student teachers in the study appeared to hold both negative and positive views about the teaching activity.

The positive views that some student teachers held can be looked at as being a result of the favourable aspects that student teachers saw in teaching. The views about the positive aspects of the teaching activity in the study appeared to be related to a teacher education programme that student teachers underwent before they qualified to be teachers as well as the intellectual nature of the teaching profession. The negative views that student teachers held can be related to the unsavoury aspects of the teaching activity. The student teachers' views about the unsavoury aspects of the teaching activity in the study seemed to be predominantly related to the poor conditions in which secondary school teachers worked.

7.4 Positive views of the teaching profession

Some student teachers expressed positive views about teaching. They viewed teaching, especially the secondary school teacher education component, as something that helped teachers to be more knowledgeable. Some student teachers tended to attach attending further education to their positive view of teachers being highly knowledgeable. Teaching was said to refresh one's knowledge all the time. A student teacher said:

> *Your knowledge never deteriorates and hence you are active academically and have a very high chance of going for further studies (second year male student teacher).*

Another student teacher said:

> *Education courses that teachers study makes one to have his knowledge updated. It is easier for someone doing education courses to continue with his/her education because his mind is still fresh and active (second year male student teacher).*

The teaching activity as an intellectual activity enabled teachers to read more and enhance their knowledge at all times. The views from two student teachers above seemed to emanate from courses which student teachers had to study during teacher education to enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes about teaching. In addition, when teachers secure teaching

posts, they were expected to continue to read extensively in preparation for their lessons in various subjects which they teach.

Related to the idea of increased reading in education and other related areas, I found that student teachers said that they were able to develop a liking of wide reading as a result of the teaching activity. The views of a student teacher captured how a culture of wide reading developed as a result of teaching:

> *You cultivate a culture of wide reading as a result of being a teacher (second year female student teacher).*

Furthermore, wide reading was regarded as a way of enhancing the development of analytical thinking among teachers. A student teacher felt that teachers were at a better position to look at circumstances and use their analytical minds to understand such circumstances better. A student teacher said:

> *You develop meaningful understanding of circumstances because you are able to analyse and evaluate circumstances based on your knowledge gained from teaching (second year female student teacher).*

Based on these perceptions of some of the student teachers, a professional activity of teaching embodied positive aspects for some student teachers who joined a teacher education programme. The most important outcome that student teachers were expected to achieve was that of becoming effective teachers. However, there were other outcomes that student teachers were able to attain as a result of undergoing the programme. They thought the programme helped them to acquire appropriate attitudes that were necessary for a professional activity of teaching. In the course of pursuing the values of teaching, namely; knowledge, skills and attitude, student teachers also developed a culture of reading widely. The culture of wide reading was viewed as positive as it enhanced student teachers' development of analytical thinking.

It was fascinating to note that none of the student teachers in the research study said that they regarded teaching as a positive activity because school teachers enjoy social status and respect within the community. In another study, Holmes (1998) found that teachers felt that they were respected and enjoyed social status. Equally, teachers seemed to be respected because they were known as people teaching future leaders of the world (Holmes, 1998). The difference might be because of the relative dynamics between experienced teachers and student teachers. The student teachers might have only thought of their own learning during teaching practice. Another possible explanation could be that student teachers might have felt that they had not fully developed the identity of 'the teacher' deserving respect in course of

the teaching practice as opposed to a full time teacher who might have developed the identity of 'the teacher' and also accepted the role of educating the nation (Holmes, 1998).

7.5 Negative views of the teaching profession

As noted earlier, negative views of the teaching activity can be looked at as those that represent unsavoury and unwelcome aspects of the teaching activity system on teachers' lives. The negative views in the study gravitated around what could be regarded as poor work conditions of teachers. The negative views clustered around economic and social-cultural inhibitors in the settings such as low pay, teachers' lack of incentives, behaviour of teachers in society, and lack of trust for teachers.

7.5.1 Perceived low pay and lack of incentives for teachers

Some student teachers viewed teachers' salaries as low and that teachers did not receive financial incentives such as allowances. The comments by one student teacher portrayed the views about low salary and lack of incentives among teachers:

> *The benefits gained after finishing the course are minimal. For example, teachers are given low salaries. On top of that no other incentives like a night allowances are given yet in other profession, by conducting of meetings; they are given allowances while teachers' meetings are not honoured (second year male student teacher).*

One student teacher narrated an incident that had occurred during teaching practice to demonstrate the apparently unsavoury monetary context of teachers within the secondary school activity setting:

> *I met a friend who was doing very well in life. He was young and had a very good car but only had a diploma in clinical medicine. I started wondering whether I can be like him in this tiresome but low paying profession (second year male student teacher).*

There was a veiled suggestion in the sentiments above that other individuals with similar qualifications enjoyed better financial opportunities compared to secondary school teachers. This seemed to raise some concerns about secondary school teaching. Individuals in other professions seemed to get favourable conditions in terms of material outcomes compared to teachers. This seemed to make teachers feel frustrated about the conditions of teaching.

In addition, another student teacher witnessed a situation where a teacher was not respected. A vignette of a student teacher's critical incident log portrayed this:

> *I was walking around the trading centre when I overheard a quarrel over monetary issues. One in the quarrel was a teacher and the other was a radio repairer...the radio repairer saying 'teachers can have problems; you cannot believe they are working. We are just equals!' Soon after, the teacher left. Looking at the repairer and how he put the story, I felt concerned (second year male student teacher).*

The incident about the radio repairer's lack of respect for teachers was interpreted to mean that teachers did not deserve a higher social status. (It should be pointed out that radio

repairers in rural areas are normally people without recognizable professional education. They normally carry out their activity under shop verandas. Radio repairers normally operate in isolation). The radio repairer seemed to suggest that the status of the teaching was lower because teachers experienced monetary problems.

Sugrue (1996) noted that teachers continue to enjoy social status and respect within communities particularly in rural settings. It was therefore surprising that teachers in some rural areas in this study did not seem to be accorded the social status and respect that they had been accorded in other rural settings. The status of teaching seemed to decline during pre-service teacher preparation and in the early years of teaching (Akyeampong and Lewin, 2002). Positive beliefs in the status of teaching are essential for those in teacher education to derive satisfaction from it.

Poor salary was also a topic of discussion even among teachers in relation to the teachers' economic conditions. It appeared that salaries that teachers received created some negative feelings among them. The teachers seemed to acknowledge the poor salaries they received and felt that they would die poor if they continued to remain in secondary school teaching. One student teacher noted:

> *Some teachers were talking about what the teaching profession entails. They were saying it is too involving but less paying. This implied that only people without plans can die teachers (second year male student teacher).*

The discussion of teachers above resonated in some newspapers. The views by student teachers were shared by a newspaper opinion columnist that teachers were generally underpaid in Malawi. For instance, a comment in one of the daily papers in Malawi portrayed teachers' conditions of pay:

> *It is sad to observe that teachers in Malawi are paid salaries that are not sufficient for their survival throughout the month. Teachers in most parts of the country complain about inadequate salaries and delays in getting paid. This is discouraging the teachers from discharging their duties effectively resulting in poor performance by pupils in class. Instead of concentrating on the job, many teachers engage in extra activities to find money to supplement their meagre salaries (Malawi Nation, 2007).*

The sentiments among teachers that they were poorly remunerated suggested that there was an issue within teaching that had to be resolved if teachers were to feel satisfied. There was a suggestion that teachers had to look elsewhere for alternative jobs to resolve their predicament. However, moving elsewhere was not resolving the structural salary problem of teaching. It has been argued among researchers that poor salary for teachers is among the major causes of attrition from the teaching profession in developing countries (Akyeampong and Lewin, 2002).

7.5.2 Perceived pressure on professional behaviour of teachers

In addition to low pay, some student teachers thought that teachers were expected to follow norms and regulations of teaching which they were not happy with. This meant that they were heavily controlled on a day to day and hour by hour basis and they were not autonomous in their status unlike in other professions. According to activity theory, norms and regulations govern members in an activity system. I found in the study that some student teachers regarded certain norms within the activity system of teaching as irritable and unwelcome. This was reflected by the views of two student teachers who said:

> *I feel the teaching profession is very much confining. Any behaviour contrary to teaching ethics will result to everybody's readiness to take you to task. You just cannot behave care free. I am not very happy with this because you behave from other people's point of view (second male year student teacher).*

> *I wanted to put on my favourite clothes but the teaching profession will always have an influence over your dressing. You have to be exemplary always. I will think twice about the teaching profession due to such things (second year male student teacher).*

According to a teaching practice handbook at Masambiro College, student teachers were expected to be exemplary to pupils and other members of the community. Some student teachers viewed some professional norms within teaching to contradict with their individual values. It would appear that such thinking might have been triggered by the fact that student teachers had not yet negotiated their individual identities with the professional identities of teachers as they were still undergoing teacher education programme. There appeared to be a clash of identities between the personal and professional within student teachers. It was fascinating to see that student teachers regarded the professional identity of teachers as limiting in some way as it did not allow them to mix it with their personal identities. This is where negative perceptions seemed to develop. The conflict between the personal and professional identities demonstrated that student teachers experienced difficulties achieving what has been called 'wholeness' in professional lives (Nias, 1989). As already noted, student teachers were still in the process of their professional development and the process of development may involve some resistance and renegotiation of identities.

According to activity theory, activity systems require norms to govern their activities. However, some members of a professional community may not stick to the agreed-upon norms. It might be a way of demonstrating that the norms are not preferable. Other members may attempt to find means to change 'unlikable' norms. In activity theory competing values may be espoused by individuals based on their beliefs about a professional activity and this may bring disturbances (see Kuutti, 1996). However, when norms become compatible with

individual needs, some members of society may regard the reorganized activity system as positive for productive professional and personal development.

7.5.3 Perceived lack of trust of teachers

Some student teachers felt that society did not appear to trust some members of the school teaching community in regard to their relationship with pupils. This lack of trust appeared to affect mainly male student teachers. Some student teachers lamented:

> *If you are a male like me, people do not really trust you as somebody worthy to be with the female pupils without having love relationships with them. This is a source of embarrassment when you feel you are not trusted (second year male student teacher).*

> *As a young man, people could not trust me as it concerns my behaviour with female pupils. They think I am constantly in search of casual sex with pupils and as such made all sorts of allegations when I was with these female pupils. To avoid such forces I became quiet when it comes to interacting with girls and the very same people started accusing me of being very harsh to pupils especially girls (second year male student teacher).*

The impact of disrepute among student teachers was that they could withdraw from social settings that suggested the likelihood of improper behaviour occurring whether real or imagined. The findings here contrast sharply with Holmes' (1998) who found that primary school teachers in Gambia were respected and admired because they were doing right. Teachers were regarded as professionals holding moral stance and position and also upheld community values by acting as moral guardians through their own actions and behaviour (Holmes, 1998). The moral position of teachers (Holmes, 1998) was similar to that of Grace's (1987) concept of teachers as social and cultural missionaries or secular priesthoods.

In contrast, student teachers in this study felt they were not trusted by members of the community because of the perceived tendency by teachers to develop inappropriate sexual relationships with female pupils. Dunne and Leach (2005) reported of a case in Botswana where a school teacher was dismissed for making sexual advances in female pupils. Therefore, the lack of trust for teachers in the study could have been occasioned by precedents which the student teachers in the study might not have been aware of. On the other hand, the student teachers could have been aware of such cases but did not considered themselves to be equally untrustworthy.

7.6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter was designed to present and discuss findings on the motives that student teachers hoped to achieve as a result of enrolling on the secondary school teacher education programme as well as the student teachers' perceptions of the teaching activity within an activity theory framework. It has been demonstrated in the chapter that there were two central themes, namely; utilitarian and altruistic thinking, which underlined the goals and

visions of student teachers for enrolling on secondary school teacher education programme. It is important to state that utilitarianism and altruism were regarded as flexible concepts in the study. In some cases some views that student teachers cited for joining secondary school teacher education programme could be seen to have both utilitarian and altruistic tendencies. However on a continuum of utilitarian to altruistic, it was possible to place such views with either utilitarian or altruistic reasoning.

The utilitarian strands of thinking were clustered around three areas ranging from; secondary school teacher education as a result of failure to pursue desired careers, secondary school teacher education offered a stepping stone, and secondary school teacher education as a means to upgrade. On the other hand, altruistic strands of thinking were clustered around two strands, namely; secondary school teaching was a vocation; and related to this was the thinking that secondary teaching would ensure that teachers serve society. The significance of the motives of student teachers was that they helped to demonstrated that not all people who enrolled on teacher education programme did so with the ultimate goal of becoming teachers in the first place. It further demonstrated that individuals with competing and different goals may meet in a professional activity system of a teacher education programme and their professional development within teaching would be heavily implicated by their ultimate goals and visions they held.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that student teachers tended to think both in positive as well as negative terms about the teaching activity. The positive perceptions of the teaching activity were mainly concerned with the intellectual nature of a secondary teacher education programme. Teachers were said to be generally well knowledgeable and were willing to read more because of the intellectual nature of their profession. As a result of reading extensively, teachers developed some values of scholarship which was thought to enhance their analytical understanding of issues. It is however not clear whether many teachers in Malawi were able to progress into further education based on the fact that they were teachers. It should be noted, though, that teachers on this programme are able to join the university to upgrade their qualifications to degree level.

On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that some student teachers perceived teaching negatively. The negative perceptions seemed to be borne out of the perceived low salaries that teachers received, perceived lack of incentives, perceived lack of trust from society, and perceived pressure on student teachers to adhere to professional norms. Low salaries affected the level of respect that teachers seemed to be accorded by some members of society.

Pressure on student teachers to adhere to the norms demonstrated that student teachers felt that teaching was confining. Some student teachers perceived the norms that teachers were subjected to as limiting. Student teachers felt that society seemed to expect a lot of from teachers and this was a cause for concern. The perceptions of student teachers were important because they shed some light on issues that influence and affect teacher motivation and professional development within teaching. People who predominantly view teaching in negative terms may find it more challenging and are likely to leave teaching earlier than those who perceive teaching in positively.

In the next chapter, I present an analysis and discussion of research findings related to the experiences of third year cohort of student teachers who participated in this research study. The participants were placed at Limbani Secondary School for teaching practice.

CHAPTER EIGHT: RESEARCH FINDINGS ON EXPERIENCES OF THIRD YEAR STUDENT TEACHERS

8.0 Introduction

This chapter constitutes research findings mainly from the third year cohort of student teachers placed at Limbani secondary school for teaching practice. The chapter provides an analysis and discussion of research findings from qualitative materials collected from student teachers in relation to their experiences during teaching practice. There were four female student teachers who participated in the study at Limbani secondary school. They were all in the third year of the secondary school teacher education programme. The student teachers were preparing to teach arts and social studies. From an activity theory perspective, the central questions about experiences of student teachers during teaching practice included the following:

(a)   How did activity systems within teaching practice influence the ways in which student teachers developed in teaching?

(b)   How did student teachers experience and think about activity settings of teaching practice?

(c)   How did the conduct of teaching practice explain contradictions/tensions of student teachers?

(d)   How did student teachers and supervisors envision the activity system of teaching practice?

The findings were generated from data collected through interviews, critical incident log entries and classroom observations. The interviews that were conducted with college lecturers offered additional data about experiences of student teachers from the point of view of teacher educators. Documents provided secondary information on some of the issues in the research questions. As noted in **Chapter Six**, data analysis was couched within the perspectives of activity theory. Activity theory was useful for bringing together a wide range of varying experiences of individuals during teaching practice (Engeström, 1999).

8.1 Student teachers' views of the school setting

The importance of assessing the perceptions of student teachers about the activity setting of the school where they were placed for teaching practice cannot be overemphasized. Activity

theory's emphasis on the settings in which development takes place distinguishes it from theoretical perspectives that assume that teaching is a solitary profession (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). It shifts attention instead to the social and cultural factors that mediate development in particular contexts, thus allowing an understanding of how particular environments guide student teachers towards particular beliefs and practices about teaching (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). From an activity theory perspective, activity settings are social contexts in which student teachers were engaged during teaching practice and which created meanings for them. These activity settings also provide constraints and affordances that channel, limit, and support student teachers' efforts to adopt prevailing social practices (Grossman *et al.*, 1999).

The way student teachers considered the secondary school at which they were placed had some ramifications on how they experienced teaching practice. In relation to Limbani secondary school, a student teacher said:

> *I decided the teaching practice placement and the school is one of the best in Malawi. I could teach knowing that the pupils will get something at the end of it all. This is because this school has a good reputation and is run by Catholic Church (student teacher).*

Another student teacher said:

> *I decided myself to be here and the zone coordinator just finalized it for me. I am happy here because the pupils seem to be well behaved than in other schools (student teacher).*

Another student teacher had this to say about choice of the school:

> *I selected the school for my placement and the teaching practice coordinator upheld my choice of placement. The school is nice and favourable for teaching practice (student teacher).*

The images that student teachers held about Limbani secondary school helped mediate how they felt about going to the school for teaching practice. The student teachers placed at the school tended to relate well to images that they held about the school. The positive images of the school prompted student teachers to choose it for teaching practice. It may be argued that student teachers were more likely to have productive learning experiences in a school they perceived to be in better conditions rather than in a school where they held a lot of negative images. However, that depended on other factors apart from the positive images of the school, such as availability of teaching and learning resources.

The student teachers seemed to have prepared to face well-behaved and motivated pupils at the school. The secondary school was run by a Roman Catholic Church and this seemed to present student teachers with a priesthood image of their roles (see Grace, 1987). The school had a good reputation in general. The school had image properties that were construed in specifically positive ways. These image properties seemed to play a mediating role for student teachers to individually construct the setting of teaching practice at the school.

The findings showed that the coordinator of teaching practice did not force the student teachers to go to a particular school. This was important because forcing student teachers to go to a particular school could generate concerns especially in cases where individuals were forced to go to schools about which they did not have any positive views.

There was one student teacher who had chosen a different school only to change her mind and come to this particular school. The student teacher had realized that she did not like the setting of the school where she was initially placed. She said:

> *I decided to come to this district but placement is done by zone coordinators. At first, I was placed at another school and I was not pleased that is when I asked to be moved to this school which materialized (student teacher).*

It would appear that the student teacher did not have any clear image about the school which she was placed at initially. This seemed to have triggered the desire to move to Limbani secondary school. As I have already noted, Limbani secondary school evoked positive images among some student teachers. Student teachers' perceptions of the school were generally good although they tended to identify some sources of disturbances in the setting once they were at the school as evident in the proceeding paragraphs.

From my personal observations during visits to Limbani secondary school, I noted that the school was located on the periphery of a city. It had purposely built physical infrastructures such as classrooms, library, laboratories and dormitories. The classroom blocks were adequate and had most of the basic requirements for teaching and learning such as desks. The school had a history of good pass rates in national examinations. Pupils at the school were said to behave well. Pupils who were selected to go to the school were supposed to be on the top performing list on the national merit list. The experiences of student teachers in the school depended at least, in part, on images that favourably responded to their developmental needs. As I pointed out in **Chapter Three**, student teachers who undergo teaching practice in favourable environment stand a better chance of developing norms encouraging self-perpetuating growth and are more likely to develop greater commitment to the teaching profession (Rosenholtz, 1989).

However, all the student teachers at Limbani Secondary School pointed out some resource constraints in the school that might be considered as sources of tensions and disturbances. The student teachers corroborated each other on this. The first one said:

> *There are enough reference books in History but the English section lacks grammar books. The grammar books we were using were borrowed from another school (student teacher).*

The other one said:

The school has all the necessary resources except English where some books were not there. The books are not enough and some books are not appropriate to the level of the pupils. This means that my preparation in college is not appropriate for secondary school teaching practice (student teacher).

Another student teacher said:

Some resources were not available. We were lacking other teaching materials and teachers' guides (student teacher).

The fourth one said:

The location is good however a number of resources are lacking. For example, Home Economics laboratories are in total chaos. Chart papers were finished when they were needed most. That affected my delivery of lessons. You can imagine trying to look for teaching and learning materials while also busy trying to write lesson plans and mark pupils work (student teacher).

It would appear that some tools for teaching and learning were in short supply or not available at the school. This meant that student teachers were affected during their actions of teaching practice. The shortage or absence of some tools meant that the activity setting also provided constraints to the student teachers' efforts to adopt teaching strategies which they had learned in college. The college appeared to have prepared the student teachers to use teaching and learning aids. The tools were important to mediate the interactions between teaching practice and student teachers. The shortage of tools meant that the social context of teaching practice did not provide an appropriate environment for the activity of teaching practice with particular reference to use of specific tools. It provided student teachers with little opportunity to appropriately use of tools within a school set up (Grossman *et al.,* 1999).

As pointed out at the beginning of this section, the student teachers noted that the secondary school at which they were placed was ideal for teaching practice because, among other reasons, pupils were generally well-behaved. I found however, that some student teachers were also affected by the behaviour of some pupils at the school. According to three student teachers, some pupils in class seemed to undermine their authority and status. Some pupils did this by asking what a student teacher regarded as 'obvious questions'. In addition, some pupils were said to deliberately fail to answer questions that student teacher asked them. The affected student teachers pointed out:

Form 3 pupils sometimes act in a way that they try to undermine you, for examples, asking questions whose answers they know just to check your teaching (student teacher).

Form 1 pupils sometimes ask questions whose answers are obvious just to taste how confident I am (student teacher).

Form 3 pupils are sometimes very rude you can ask them a question but they cannot answer you though they know the answer (student teacher).

These experiences suggested that some student teachers at the school were never accorded appropriate authority by virtue of being learner teachers. The indiscipline that student

teachers experienced seemed to do with an attempt by pupils to want student teachers to portray their inexperience. Pupils seemed to test the competence of student teachers. It could be argued that the image that student teachers had about the secondary school setting in relation to pupil behaviour seemed to change once student teachers were actively involved in lesson delivery at the school and as they partly became members of the school community.

It appears that there were some images of the school which student teachers might not have been aware of at the time they were coming to the school for teaching practice. As a result, they might have gone to the school with improper expectations of how the school setting was going to offer a productive mediating role in their professional development during teaching practice. It could be argued that the productive experiences of teaching practice by student teachers in such circumstances depended on their ability to find appropriate ways of dealing with the problems which they faced. This was where the role of other teachers and supervisors to mediate in their circumstances mattered. As it will be seen in the proceeding sections, cooperating teachers and supervisors did not appear to embrace appropriate mediating roles for productive experiences of student teachers (see **Section 8.5**).

8.2 Division of tasks among student teachers

Teaching practice in the school involved dividing tasks among student teachers so that they could practice and learn about teaching in the school. Student teachers were in theory also expected to assume roles that were equal to their novice status of learners. They were expected to be assigned tasks that they could carry out and learn from. An appropriate allocation of tasks to student teachers would be viewed as productive source of professional development. It could only be desirable that student teachers were given tasks that they could manageably carry out as they got to grips with the reality of teaching. Where student teachers were given large amount of tasks, it contradicted with their status of learners.

The findings from the student teachers at Limbani secondary school showed that they were assigned manageable tasks for teaching practice. The number of periods that they were assigned ranged between 12 and 16 per week. Student teachers perceived the number of periods as appropriate for teaching practice.

The student teacher with the lowest number of periods at the school said:

> *I have been allocated 12 periods per week and I think they are manageable (student teacher).*

The student teacher who had been given the highest number of periods at the school said:

> *I have 16 periods per week. This is reasonable because I am able to prepare for my lessons (student teacher).*

It would appear that the number of periods assigned to student teachers did not raise any matters of major concern. However, the concern was where a student teacher had fewer periods but the periods run consecutively on certain days. This provided tensions and a source of constraint that hindered the student teacher to smoothly carry out activities during those consecutive periods. A student teacher pointed out:

> *I have twelve periods per week which is not bad. However, I am not comfortable on Wednesday when four periods come consecutively from 7.30 up to 10.00 am. I don't get time to rest and reflect on what I have taught before I go to teach another class (student teacher).*

The spacing of periods was a factor that determined how comfortable student teachers were with the periods. Periods that ran successively brought discomfort in student teachers. Some student teachers seemed to need time to think or reflect on their activities between periods. Where periods were congested on certain days, student teachers felt overwhelmed by the amount of activities they had to carry out without room for reflection. The student teacher who was assigned successive periods demonstrated that the school might have been reinforcing the teacher role which contradicted the apprentice student teacher role. This was a possible indication of the clash of activity systems, where the pragmatic dominated. It would appear that the school system had a tendency to subsume and subjugate the student teacher system. The school system dictated the conduct of the student teachers while they were in the school.

Some student teachers seemed to be placed in a teaching system when in actual fact the school system was meant to be a source of learning to teach. However, the school system did not seem to recognize the learning system within the school arguably because they were not provided with necessary expectations and roles regarding the activities of student teachers in the school (see **Section 8.5**). A teaching practice supervisor corroborated the student teachers' views. The supervisor said that student teachers were supposed to be assigned the maximum of three periods per day to promote proper lesson planning among student teachers. One of the supervisors said:

> *I think 10 to 15 periods is okay for a student teacher. By this I mean at least 2 to 3 periods per day to give chance for them to plan for their next lesson (supervisor).*

Underlying the tension of the student teacher was that student teachers were learning to teach. Supervisors noted that student teachers be assigned a good number of periods that did not exceed fifteen per week. The views expressed by one supervisor summed the expectations of most supervisors in relation to the number of periods that student teachers were supposed to be assigned. A supervisor said:

> *The reasonable number is between 10 and 15. Student teachers need a lot of time for preparation but also need to have a feeling of real teaching experiences (supervisor).*

While some of the supervisors linked the number of periods that student teachers were supposed to have to proper preparations, others said that student teachers needed fewer periods so that they could be involved in extracurricular activities. This was seen as a way of widening student teachers' involvement in the multifaceted activities in the school activity system of teaching (see **Section 4.2** for the multifaceted activity of teaching practice). Student teachers could be involved in other activities outside the classroom which were part and parcel of the teaching job. A supervisor said:

> *Student teachers ought to be given between 10-16 periods per week. This is reasonable as it gives them time to get involved in extra curricular activities (supervisor).*

I concluded from the sentiments that student teachers had been assigned periods that were in accordance with supervisors' expectations. This helped to stress the point that student teachers needed more time to prepare their lessons and take part in extracurricular activities. It also underscored the view that the status of student teachers required manageable workloads for them to learn from what they were doing and also to be involved in the multifaceted nature of the teaching activity. However, it is necessary to say that the school system had to operate normally even though the other members of the teaching community had not fully attained a teacher status. The concern of a student teacher who was assigned four successive periods on a day suggested that there were competing outcomes at stake in the activity systems of the school and student teachers. For the student teachers, the school tasks offered them the opportunities to learn to teach in the school whereas the school system did not appear to consider the learner status of student teachers and assigned them tasks to teach just as other teachers in the school. The two activity systems of student teacher and teaching seemed to clash in regard to the ultimate goals for which they were in the school system. This can be blamed in part, on the lack of collaborative partnership between the school and the college as demonstrated in **Section 8.5.1.**

The other issue for student teachers within the school's activity system had to do with the class sizes in which they had to conduct tasks with the object of learning to teach. The size of classes which student teachers were assigned had implications on their experiences at the school. The nature of the class was important in the way that student teachers could carry out activities. Student teachers could be affected more by the class size than other qualified teachers by virtue of their status as learners. I found that some student teachers were subjected to large classes in the school.

One student teacher said:

> *The average number of pupils in my class is 50 pupils. They are not manageable because we are encouraged to assist individual pupils during our college training. This is impossible to do with 50 pupils in your class (student teacher).*

Another student teacher said:

> *The number of pupils in my class range from 40 to 50. The class which has 40 pupils is manageable unlike the one with 50 pupils. This class is difficult in sharing of resources like textbooks, in conducting group work. It results in formation of large groups which are difficult to manage (student teacher).*

For student teachers, the large classes represented some hindrance to the application of tools/artifacts that they had learned in the college. The conceptual tools within learner-centred pedagogy, such as group activities, and also individualized lessons seemed to fail to be effectively implemented in the large classes. This suggested that even though student teachers may have had acquired appropriate conceptual and pedagogical knowledge and skills in the college, the crowded classroom structures in the school did not mediate favourably for their use. The tools seemed to effectively work in classroom settings with smaller numbers of pupils.

The absence of necessary classroom settings for use of particular tools might suggest that student teachers were not able to practice just how useful the tools were (or at least, question the applicability of tools). However, the school could have given student teachers a small section of the class. It would appear that the student teachers became subservient to the dominance of the school practice in regard to the class sizes. The perspective of the school seemed to subsume the perspective of the student teachers. This represented an inherent clash between two systems. This clash created tension for the student teachers as they were not given the opportunities to carry out teaching practice according to how they had been prepared in the college.

Based on the evidence above, some school settings discouraged particular practices that presumably participants saw as worthwhile based on the knowledge that they had acquired in college. The settings of classrooms in the school provided constraints that hindered student teachers' efforts to adopt and use 'popular' practices encouraged by a teacher education college (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). This suggested that there were three competing activity systems; the school operating as a school, the student teacher operating to get through the course, and the college operating to shape the practice of student teachers. However, the school system was more important in defining the activities of student teachers than the college. While student teachers were equipped with knowledge from the college, they had to rely more on the school setting to mediate during teaching practice.

On the other hand, some student teachers can regard the larger classes as good. For instance, one student teacher said:

> *I have 46 pupils in form 1B and 42 pupils in form 3B which is a good number. I do not face any problems with this because I sometimes use group work where I give help to the group at once should there be any problems. However, it would have been better to have 30 pupils because you can easily give individual assistance to each one and groups are smaller (student teacher).*

Even though the student teacher seemed not to derive any major difficulty with the class sizes, she seemed to agree with the general view that smaller class sizes were important for understanding the needs of all pupils in class. The thinking that she was able to help pupils in groups seemed to overlook the need for teaching and learning to assist all pupils as individuals according to their needs.

The student teacher who conducted lessons in smaller classes noted that she was able to use a number of pedagogical tools she had learned during her coursework without any constraints. She had this to say:

> *I have the following numbers of pupils in my classes; 34, 18, 38, 12. They are the right numbers because it is easy for me to assign them activities in groups and to help them individually and in groups during and after class. It is easy to manage them and use role plays. It is easy to do some marking. I wish all student teachers had the same numbers of pupils in their classrooms (student teacher).*

The student teacher quoted above demonstrated that smaller class sizes promoted the use of many concepts and pedagogical tools of learning to teach during teaching practice. For the student teachers with smaller class sizes, teaching practice setting encouraged use of particular practices and tools that supervisors and student teachers saw as worthwhile to a better future within effective teaching (Waite, 2003). In this case, the activity setting provided affordances that supported student teachers' efforts to adopt prevailing practices as learned in college (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). For the student teachers with smaller class sizes, their experiences offered them a deeper understanding of what they had learned in college. It could be said that these student teachers might have had positive experiences of teaching practice in this respect.

8.3 Pedagogical activities of student teachers

There were pedagogical activities that student teachers were required to carry out as part of teaching practice. Pedagogical actions in the classroom settings were an integral part of the activity system of teaching practice and demanded of student teachers to demonstrate some abilities within the activity of teaching. In theory, student teachers were expected to undergo an 'educative practicum' (Zeichner, 1996) as they carried out pedagogical actions in the school.

Student teachers' knowledge and awareness of the subject contents they were expected to teach during teaching practice was crucial during their pedagogical activities in classrooms. This was because competence in the subject content is an indication that student teachers could be ready for teaching specific subjects on the school curriculum. While student teachers knew most of the subject contents, there were situations where some student teachers experienced constraints with specific subject contents. This led to lack of confidence during lesson delivery. A student teacher pointed out:

> *I was not conversant with one topic. I searched in the library but it was in vain. I had no confidence when I was teaching (student teacher).*

The view represented a gap between what was in the syllabus and what the student teacher knew and this created some tension manifested through low level of confidence during the teaching session. This may be viewed as a potential dilemma for both the student teacher and pupils. The absence of necessary pedagogical tools such as books could mean that the student teacher tried to mediate the knowledge gap but failed. This suggested that both the school and the college systems did not provide some form of support to resolve knowledge levels of student teachers. The school system failed to mediate the knowledge gap due to shortage of books. On the other hand, the college system allowed student teachers to go on teaching practice before they had fully mastered all the subject matter they were supposed to use as part of their teaching practice.

Another student teacher said:

> *Some contents were confusing and difficult for me to teach. There was not any form of help that I could get to deal with difficult contents (student teacher).*

The student teacher's admission of a knowledge gap on specific subject contents was compounded by the apparent lack of support within the pedagogical contexts. This suggests the need for supporting student teachers in the classroom setting. However, the school system had a different perspective of teaching compared to that of the student teacher. It would appear that support around subject content knowledge may not have been fully part of the school system's perspective while student teachers appeared to expect support in that area of need.

The lack of essential support in the student teacher learning context in the school seemed to exacerbate the problem. The conception of how to teach particular subject contents invariably draws on knowledge of the specific content of the discipline as well as the availability of necessary tools for teaching and learning (Cohen, 1990; Shulman, 1986). Some student teachers appeared to have an inadequate content knowledge about some

contents as well as lacking the tools and support to mediate the knowledge gap in subject content.

It was intriguing to note that some student teachers were capable of giving incorrect answers in pedagogical contexts because of a knowledge gap on subject contents. A student teacher said:

> *A pupil asked a question during an English lesson which I did not know the answer. I tried to answer but I knew I was cheating the pupil (student teacher).*

The student teacher failed to answer a specific question from a pupil in one of the classes she taught. It appears she felt she still had to give an answer and ended up giving an incorrect response. This suggested several things; it might suggest that the internal representation that the student teachers had of a teacher's role was that a teacher ought to be well knowledgeable and had to pass that knowledge to pupils. This seems to appeal to the traditional representation of the role of a teacher. This implied that some student teachers considered themselves to need to appear fully capable even though they were only novices and had to cover up their weaknesses of their pedagogical actions to portray the teacher role. This view suggests that some student teachers tend to bridge systems by accepting the school teacher role which they were not. With system bridging, the student teacher role may be obscured as the student teacher may not see the inherent subsystems at work in the school.

The attempt to portray this image of teacher-self to pupils might partly have been driven by the pressure that pupils were critical reality definers of student teachers' abilities (Riseborough, cited in Bullough, 1991). However, such a role contradicted with the general expectations of the novice role of the student teacher. The activity system of student teachers was meant to be governed by the novice role whereby student teachers were capable of making some mistakes when they took on a teacher role which they had not yet attained.

The action of the student teacher above may, in theory, be contradictory to the reform agenda of teacher education that regards teachers as facilitators of classroom learning (Engeström, 1987). The reform agenda seem to manifest in the explanation that another student teacher gave during post-observation interviews. I had noted that a certain student teacher failed to answer a question that a pupil had asked her. The pupil had asked:

> *What is the gestation period of a cow (pupil)?*

She failed to provide an immediate answer and said that she was going to answer the question in the next lesson. During the post observation session I had with her, she appeared to complain:

Pupils expected me to give all the answers. It is not possible (student teacher).

The student teacher above represented a different belief system about the student teacher's position in relation to subject content knowledge. The view was that student teachers could not know everything and needed to portray that to pupils so that they could both proceed to explore together areas where pupils were anxious to learn about. This might help promote the reform agenda where student teachers perceived that they were not in control of knowledge but rather that knowledge was shared by both pupils and teachers in the teaching and learning process.

The findings showed that it was possible in some instances for student teachers not to know all subject contents. Research has shown that some student teachers may have poor knowledge of the subject they are expected to teach (Gaynor, 1994). There may be a positive correlation between student teachers' knowledge of subject knowledge and the impact on the classroom (Wilson *et al.,* 2001).

8.4 Use of learner-centred pedagogy

As I noted in **Section 3.3.2**, learner-centred education is considered as an effective antidote to the prevalence of teacher-centred didactic classroom practices. Student teachers were trained in the values and practices of learner-centred pedagogy in college and were required to carry out learner-centred pedagogy lessons during teaching practice. While the practice of learner-centred pedagogy was encouraged, I found that some student teachers felt that the approach was not always easy to implement. Some student teachers pointed out that most pupils at the school were unfamiliar with learner-centred pedagogy. In addition, I found that the activity setting of teaching practice especially the physical setting (where some class sizes were large) inhibited the use of learner-centred pedagogy.

Two student teachers said that they experienced difficulties due to pupils' inability to adjust to the learner-centred pedagogy suggesting that pupils in the school were used to a different approach from the one which was encouraged to be used by student teachers. This could be considered as a clash of practices between the school system and the college system, the impact of which was felt by the student teachers. A student teacher stated:

> *Most pupils have difficulties in adjusting to learner-centred strategies. Mostly they do not participate in activities. I found that some pupils are slow and don't want to be involved. They first want to give them all the information. This gives me difficulties in adjusting the methods whilst in the teaching process (student teacher).*

According to an activity theory, classrooms are complex settings mediated by long-held pedagogical practice. However, the pedagogical practice which student teachers were expected to use were different from what pupils in the school system were used to.

According to one student teacher, the use of learner-centred pedagogy was apparently blocked by pupils:

> ..*Pupils are reluctant to get involved in group activity or role play. This affects the use of pupil centred teaching (student teacher).*

Pupils in the school system were said to "*be slow and did not take part in the activities*" that the student teacher had designed for use within learner-centred pedagogy. This meant that the approach that the student teacher was supposed to use during teaching practice was resisted by the inherent and established social practices of pupils (and other teachers) in the school even though it was highly regarded by the college. Obviously, this represented a clash of activity systems both in terms of their values and practices. Resistance meant that the strategy would not be used successfully in the school.

In addition, this demonstrated that the teaching approach that student teachers learned in college did not necessarily reflect the practice within secondary schools where student teachers would eventually be posted to teach. Secondary schools seemed to operate within their own pedagogical schema whereas the college system (operating in its own pedagogical schema) expected student teachers to use a reform agenda driven by learner-centred pedagogy and this led to clashes between individual student teachers and pupils in the school system. This brings to mind the question of relevance of teacher education programme on actual classroom practice. It would appear that not all that was learned in college was relevant to the current practice in secondary school systems. This highlights the tension between the status quo and the urge for change.

Two student teachers corroborated each other and said that they were unable to successfully employ the learner-centred pedagogy because of large class size. This could have an impact on the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in addition to the 'resistance' from pupils. They said:

> *The class which has 40 pupils is manageable unlike the one with 50 pupils. This class is difficult in sharing of resources like textbooks, in conducting group work. It results in formation of large groups which are difficult to manage and making sure all pupils are participating (student teacher).*
>
> *I have a problem with implementing group activity because classes are too big (student teacher).*

The structure of classrooms provided hindrances to use learner-centered pedagogy. Group activity was one strategy of delivering learner-centred pedagogy. The classrooms with forty pupils appeared to be conducive for learner-centred pedagogy whereas those with fifty pupils were a hindrance for use of learner-centred pedagogy. However, a class size of forty pupils is considered to be unacceptably large in developed countries. Large class sizes inhibited

formation of small groups which might promote active participation by pupils. Small classes also increase pupil talk and use of varied learner-centred pedagogical artifacts. The small class size may also promote supportive learning opportunities for individual learners.

Student teachers also demonstrated that learner-centred pedagogy operated within social spaces which required appropriate tools to mediate interactions within the settings. There was need to have in place mediating tools for learner-centred pedagogy. It was noted earlier that some pedagogical tools necessary for learner-centred pedagogy such as textbooks and other teaching aids were not available.

The use of learner-centred pedagogy seemed to have also been compounded by the apparent discrepancy between the activity system of the college and the secondary school. I noted the following during observing one student teacher:

> *The teaching strategy that dominated the lesson was that of teacher centred instruction. The student teacher was the only person that was talking in the lesson. Pupils were listening to what she was saying. She would ask the whole class a question to which they responded with some chorus answer. The student teacher retained the development of lesson and control of the learning process. The student teacher's role was seen as giving knowledge that had been defined and organized from the student teacher's perspective. There was more talk from the student teacher. There was a whole group instruction and the desks in the classroom were in rows facing a board with the student teacher's desk nearby. When I asked her why she used this method, she clearly expressed that she feared if supervisors had come she would be in problems and would be graded badly (field notes).*

The student teacher provided the view that learner-centred pedagogy may not be popular among some student teachers, or it may not have been properly appropriated in college for use in classrooms. Whenever it was used, the underlying motive appeared to have been that of achieving appropriate grades during observations by college supervisors and not necessarily as a valued tool for promoting pupil involvement in their own learning. Student teachers seemed to apply the learner-centred pedagogy only in the presence of college lecturers as there appeared to be no deep-rooted practice in support of learner-centred pedagogy in the school system. In this sense, the failure to appropriate learner-centred pedagogy revealed that student teachers may not have subscribed to the values the college placed on learner-oriented lessons. This view was supported by the actual settings of the teaching practice schools where pupils seemed to not feel attracted to learner-centred pedagogy.

Furthermore, some student teachers seemed to view some discrepancies with the teaching methods predominantly used by lecturers in the college system, the teachers in the school system, and the methods they were encouraged to use within the student teacher system. This

suggested differing values from different activity systems which could be said to reveal contradictions. The views from two student teachers showed that:

> *Pupil-centred approach where pupils take active role in the whole teaching and learning process is emphasized for teaching practice. I once used pupil centred during microteaching once. I have noted that the other teachers in the school use teacher centred approach. In college the dominant method of teaching is lecture method (student teacher).*

> *Pupil-centred approach was emphasized and supervisors made sure we use it in the school. We get lower marks if we do not use it. We only used it during microteaching on our fellow classmates in college. The teachers I saw at this school use teacher centred strategy where the teacher is the only person talking in class. That way, they are able to cover most of the work in the syllabus. Lecturers in college just use teacher centred approach where we just listen passively without being actively involved in the lesson. We copy some notes and then go to the library to read more books on what we learn (student teacher).*

Even though lecturers wanted to supervise student teachers who were using learner-centred pedagogy as demanded by the college, the lecturers did not model student teachers on learner-centred pedagogy in the college system. This might have affected student teachers' appropriation of learner-centred pedagogy. However, lecturers were teaching adults (student teachers) and used adult teaching methods. It is believed that the lecture method which lecturers used is the most popular approach for post-secondary education.

The student teachers learned learner-centred pedagogy through lecture methods. In addition, strategies such as micro-teaching at college level were meant to address the practicability of learner-centred methodology which student teachers were expected to use in secondary school classrooms. In this sense, the expectation by some student teachers to observe their lecturers use learner-centred pedagogy might have been ill-conceived.

Equally, other teachers in the school system did not conduct their lessons using learner-centred pedagogy. The teachers in the school used teacher-centred instruction. This appeared to be the predominant practice in the school system. It may appear that pupils in the school were exposed to teacher-centred pedagogy from other teachers and this led them to oppose the learner-centred pedagogy which student teachers tried to use in their classrooms. The practice of teachers in the school system and the lecturers in college system seemed to be different from the one that student teachers were expected to use in the school system.

The student teachers might have felt that the teaching method that was predominant in the college system was equally predominant in the school system. This may have militated against them taking up values and practices of learner-centred pedagogy. Essentially, learner-centred pedagogy appeared to be an unpopular methodological practice among pupils and other teachers in the school system. The fact that supervisors were not resident in the

secondary school meant that student teachers were likely to be swayed to the dominant practices of the school system rather than the practices encouraged in college system.

Two student teachers went further to say that they would not use learner-centred pedagogy after completing their teacher education programme. They said:

> *I think I will not use this approach when I qualify as a teacher. I will teach according to how other teachers in the school will teach (student teacher).*
>
> *I cannot see myself teaching according to this approach when I become a teacher. The method is very slow and we cannot finish the syllabus if we use this approach (student teacher).*

This demonstrates that some of what student teachers had learned in college was not going to shape their practice. This showed that not all that student teachers learn in college and use during teaching practice become the guiding principles of their practices after graduation. This also suggested that secondary schools played a crucial role in determining how student teachers were ready to teach once they completed their teaching practice/teacher education programme. Some college practices and values about teaching and learning could corrode as student teachers became full-time teachers. Some actions that student teachers performed during teaching practice, such as using learner-centred pedagogy, might have only been meant to meet the assessment component of teaching practice at that time. This continues to polarize teacher education from actual secondary school teaching as argued in **Section 3.2** (see Borko and Eisenhart, 1992; Ritchie and Wilson, 1993; Zeichner and Tabachnik, 1981).

In addition, research in South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya described the difficulty of moving secondary teachers from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach (Ware, 1992). The arguments put forward for teachers' resistance to new methods resided in the culturally accepted relationship between teachers and pupils (Ware, 1992). The acceptable relationship seemed to be that of the teacher having the knowledge to transmit to pupils in the school. Ware (1992) noted that the culture of the school mediates student teachers' thinking in powerful ways as compared to the culture of the college system. Most importantly, the tendency by some student teachers to revert to the dominant teaching strategy in the school other than sticking with the strategy learned in college demonstrates the ability of the school system to self-reproduce. Even though student teachers come to schools with a different agenda and perspectives the school perspective tends to become a dominant force on their practice.

One student teacher, however, acknowledged that she was going to stick to the learner-centred pedagogy after finishing her teacher education programme. Her reasoning was that she hoped that the learner-centred instruction promoted pupil participation. For this student

teacher the school culture did not appear to heavily change her professional developmental thinking based on her teacher education programme. She had this to say:

> *I will try to use this approach because learners participate in their own learning which encourages understanding of concepts (student teacher).*

The student teacher seemed to have learned and appropriated the values of learner-centred pedagogy even though the school culture (where she conducted teaching practice) seemed to operate on a different pedagogical practice. It could be that she might have had her individual characteristics which were different from other student teachers as well as the teachers in the school. Her personality might have defined her understanding of teaching and the importance of active learner-involvement during lessons. Even though learner-centred pedagogy was not a popular approach, the student teacher said that she was prepared to stick with it after completing her teacher education programme. Whereas some of the student teachers had observed other teachers in the school use teacher-centred instruction and were 'ready to be converted' to it, she was not willing to adopt the school practice in favour of what she had learned in the college system. The varying and often conflicting belief systems and their relative authority and influence over student teachers often result in multiple conceptualizations of the ideal teacher and the multiple environmental conditions which guide professional development (Grossman *et al.,* 1999).

8.5 Community relationships

The professional community relates to the members of an activity system of teaching. There is an underlying assumption in a professional activity system that members of a professional community subscribe to the ideal of the activity system and commit themselves to it. However, multiple and competing goals often coexist within an activity setting, though some predominate (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). An activity system of the school where teachers belonged may have a history by which its members established specific goals and outcomes which guided the actions within the school. Student teachers on teaching practice were joining an already existing community of teachers in the school system.

However, as novices, student teachers were also guided by their own goals and outcomes which they expected to achieve in the school system and needed the support from teachers in the school to achieve their goals. The achievement of student teachers' goals partly depended on their relationships with other teachers (and the congruence of their goals) as well as the nature of relationships between the college system and the school system.

The relationships between student teachers and teachers in the school were important to bring about professional socialization of student teachers, a process by which new subjects become members of the community of practice and take up more roles within the profession (Merton, 1957). During the process individuals acquire values, attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge-in short the culture current in the activity system to which they are, or seek to become members (Merton, 1957). By including values, attitudes, and interests, Merton (1957) indicated that becoming a teacher involves more than the simple acquisition of academic knowledge and the skills necessary to conduct lessons. The community in the professional activity system helps student teachers to attain some level of professional socialization through sharing professional, pedagogical and social information, collaborating with each other, supporting and mentoring each other, etc.

8.5.1 Relationship between the college and secondary schools

The findings from the study revealed evidence of no deliberate collaborative links between the college and secondary school systems. The college did not make efforts to establish collaborative relationships with schools where student teachers conducted teaching practice. The schools were not told of any professional or supportive roles they were supposed to play apart from providing accommodation to student teachers. A teaching practice coordinator pointed out:

> *No contracts are signed between the college and schools. It's just a request and once schools indicate their willingness, students are sent (teaching practice coordinator).*

The absence of collaborative partnership suggested that secondary schools had no professional obligation to play so that favourable professional socialization took place for student teachers so that they could experience productive teaching practice. In addition, the absence of collaborative partnership meant that schools may not have felt bound to provide necessary conditions in which student teachers could explore subtle elements of teaching and the school culture while on teaching practice.

Some student teachers expressed concerns about the lack of support by saying:

> *I find lesson planning and preparation difficult. This is so because to find specific objectives which will satisfy tutors is difficult. Again, tutors emphasize that there should be both low level and high level lesson objectives. Sometimes objectives for the lesson can both be low and high level but the student teacher is forced to balance the objectives which become difficult when no one is supporting you (student teacher).*

> *I did not get any support from other teachers on lesson planning. The only people that supported me were fellow student teachers. I thought there was not anything new that fellow student teachers would offer me (student teacher).*

The findings demonstrated that student teachers were left on their own to plan and prepare lessons. However, student teachers were not sure whether their lesson plans met all the

requirements of the pupils in the classroom in the school system. Obviously, teachers in the school did not feel the obligation to support student teachers in various ways such as lesson planning, ensuring that they had manageable number of periods as well as ensuring that the numbers of pupils in their classrooms were right for teaching practice. The absence of collaborative partnership between college and secondary schools meant that competing or different goals for the college system and the school system stood in the way of productive experiences of student teachers. The college system's goals remained that of training effective teachers whereas for the school system, the aim was the learning of pupils. Student teachers who were placed at the school were caught between these variations of goals within activity systems. This represented a gap between related activity systems in the school system and the college. Student teachers were based at the school and the school system largely dictated their activities. It was not surprising that the school system assigned 'four consecutive periods' to a student teacher where the supervisors expected that student teachers would only manage up to three periods a day, as explored earlier (see **Section 8.2** on division of tasks).

Collaborative partnership is now the orthodoxy in terms of describing the appropriate relationship between schools and colleges in teacher education in countries such as United Kingdom and other parts of the world (see Hargreaves, 1995). Collaborative partnership promotes 'mutual engagement' as working in partnership has the potential for the student teacher to copy effective practices and avoid defective practice (Rogoff, 1990). This appeared to bring about smooth relations within the activity systems of teaching as well as teacher education programme but this seemed to be lacking in the case of the student teachers in this study.

8.5.2 Relationships between student teachers and teachers in school

The student teachers at Limbani secondary school felt that non-collegial relationships existed with teachers at the school and there were no mentoring responsibilities assigned to school teachers. Teachers in the school system seemed to form social networks which kept student teachers outside some activity settings. Student teachers were not told about some events even though their presence in the school meant that they were part of the school community. Some student teachers lamented:

> *Teachers are not very open to us. Sometimes they meet without briefing us what really is needed most especially when it comes to condoling with the bereaved (student teacher).*

> *There were two teachers who were bereaved and the teachers didn't inform us properly the procedures they follow when condoling such people. This hindered our participation since we were not briefed (student teacher).*

The relationships between student teachers and teachers in the school demonstrated that the teachers and student teachers did not create a productive learning community of sharing information. This might be blamed on the fact that the college and the school in the first place did not have collaborative relationships. Informal social networks between teachers and student teachers in the school were important for the proper socialization of student teachers since teachers in the school were experienced and could provide some information to student teachers on many aspects of the actuality of teaching as well as secondary school culture in general. According to the findings here, student teachers did not have productive interactions with the wider school life due to detached social relationships between student teachers and other school teachers.

In addition, one student teacher had the feeling that some teachers in the school doubted their level of ability in carrying out certain tasks. One student teacher was assigned responsibilities during the school's final year's graduation ceremony:

> *I was one of the members in the food committee. Old members were not happy as such they wanted us to fail but instead we performed very well such that everybody was happy including the headmistress was even overwhelmed by our performance (student teacher).*

This demonstrated that student teachers and the other teachers in the school did not create conducive community of practice where student teachers were expected to learn from other teachers. It appeared that some members of the teaching community were not happy with student teachers taking administrative roles. In a way, teachers in the school system could be said to be objecting to the legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1988) which implies the social and psychological situatedness of the activity of teaching practice. This might suggest that student teachers had tacit boundaries set for them within the operation of the school system which they may not have been aware of. This hindered their involvement in other aspects of the multifaceted actions of teaching in the course of undergoing teaching practice.

In some cases, such as the way teachers are trained in UK, school teachers are actively involved in student teachers' professional learning during teaching practice to ensure that student teachers get the support and advice they need for their growth. It is for this reason that some schools appoint teachers who work closely with student teachers. Mentors are expected to be exemplary practitioners of teaching so that student teachers can observe and emulate good practice (see **Section 3.3.1**). Mentors or 'cooperating teachers' perceptions of their roles include helping student teachers develop appropriate competence in classroom management, lesson planning, and lesson delivery among others (O'Neal, 1983).

A 'cooperating teacher' was necessary in addressing a number of issues that student teachers faced in the school environment. However, in the study I observed that the role of 'cooperating teacher' had been abolished for the following reasons:

> To a greater extent, the cooperating teachers have proved a disappointment as most of them disappear from the sight of student teachers. They don't assist. From this year 2005, cooperating teachers have been phased out, due in part to fiscal hiccups but also to the reason stated earlier (teaching practice coordinator).

The observations were that 'cooperating teachers' did not actually perform any meaningful role regarding supporting student teachers. Cooper (1995) also found that some 'cooperating teachers' identified money as a source of incentive. However, Guyton (1987) found that 'cooperating teachers' wanted to work with student teachers because they believed that student teaching was important and felt they had something to offer and had a professional responsibility to prepare new teachers. It could be argued that 'cooperating teachers' could bridge the differences between the college and school systems as noted earlier. In that way, the 'cooperating teacher' would play mediating role in minimizing the tensions which student teachers faced in the school system. I have noted in **Section 3.3.1** how the term 'cooperating teacher evokes undesirable undertones in some instances.

I noted that some teachers who had in previous years accepted to be 'cooperating teachers' were not appropriately skilled to assist student teachers. The teaching practice coordinator had this to say about cooperating teachers:

> From my knowledge, cooperating teachers were never trained in a special way to help student teachers. It is assumed that since they were in the field they were knowledgeable and would assist the student teachers (teaching practice coordinator).

This might be blamed for the lack of assistance from cooperating teachers to student teachers. It would not be expected to gain any significant help from teachers who did not have appropriate skills for the role of cooperating teacher. The training of cooperating teachers seemed to be an effective way of preparing them for the mentor role. As a result of training, cooperating teachers may value their clinical-supervision expertise, improve their supervisory skills, feel more comfortable as supervisors, and may be more eager to accept student teachers and support them in many ways possible (O'Neal, 1983).

In the study I also found that the student teachers' system did not regard the role of 'cooperating teacher' as unwanted even though it had been phased out by the college. One student teacher pointed out:

> Cooperating teacher should be the most important person at the school for the student teacher. They know how to teach and can offer us proper support on how to go about it in the school. One thing is they must be qualified teachers and not the unqualified ones. We should observe them for a time and plan lessons together. They should also help in supervision because they

are in the school and understand all the problems that the school has. They would be more sensitive than the college supervisors as they know the resource availability better (student teacher).

This was viewed as contradicting what the college supervisors believed. The absence of 'cooperating teachers' meant that student teachers had to mostly work in detachment or 'disengaged professional relationships' (see **Chapter Nine** for a substantive discussion on disengaged relationship) to decide on what instruction worked, what standard of pupil work was acceptable, and what additional knowledge, skills, or insights would best serve them and pupils (Guyton, 1987).

I found that student teachers experienced a number of challenges as a result of the absence of cooperating teachers. Student teachers identified a number of threatening situations and these clustered around the following areas:

Teaching techniques in order to improve for the better; capabilities of pupils in class; information on pupils with special needs; information concerning school; formulation of objectives and how some topics can be taught (student teachers).

The activity setting of teaching practice appeared to be threatening for student teachers. The student teachers were supposed to handle these challenges in private without the support of cooperating teachers or other teachers in the school. This meant that teaching was presented to them as private and individualistic activity. It would also be necessary to add that student teachers' activity system lacked the support that would help in the attainment of their goals of developing as teachers within actual classrooms in secondary school systems. As noted from the sentiments of the student teachers, the absence of cooperating teachers reduces chances of student teachers to find appropriate solutions to some of the school related concerns which they faced.

8.6 Activity settings of supervision

In order for the lecturers to assess the level of competence student teachers had reached, they observed them during lesson delivery in classrooms using observation forms to score the student teachers' performance. The categories they used on the observation form were determined *a priori*. The structured observational system that was used for observation was a high-inference one and this permits greater observer judgment in determining the category to which an event is assigned (Galton, 1979). The visits to the school by lecturers for supervision generated a number of concerns for student teachers. This was evident in the not-so-positive attitude of student teachers towards supervision. Student teachers seemed to report negatively of any negative comments that supervisors made about how they had conducted themselves in a supervised lesson.

8.6.1 The assessor role of supervisors

I found that the supervisor's dual responsibilities of facilitator and assessor often created problems in developing a close, trusting relationship with the student teacher. The evaluation function of supervision led some student teachers to attempt to project a positive image of themselves and a negative image of supervisors, rather than admitting weaknesses in their ability to carry out some activities during their lesson delivery.

The views from student teachers below signify the impact of the clash between supervisors and student teachers. One student teacher said:

> *One of the supervisors asked me to write a lesson plan for home economics and teach yet Home Economics was not on the time table on that day (student teacher).*

Another student teacher said:

> *Supervisors were just crushing my teaching style for the sake of criticizing and giving me lower grades. Again the way I plan and teach cannot be the same way the supervisor can plan and teach. So the advice should be given depending on one's plan and way of teaching (student teacher).*

Student teachers tended to resist unplanned situations where supervisors would observe lessons. Some student teachers were worried with the assessment component of teaching practice. This was reflected in the sentiments by a student teacher who said:

> *The presence of the supervisor on Friday affected all the classroom proceedings. One can imagine being supervised consecutively on Thursday and Friday. It really gives you heartache. I really had to change my approach to the lesson just to make sure that I impress the lecturer (student teacher).*

Here, the activity setting of supervision during teaching practice caused concern for student teachers where lecturers were seen more as assessors than facilitators. The facilitator role was rarely visible and the assessor role seemed to be dominant. Stones and Morris (1972) also reported considerable research evidence of conflicts among student teachers and supervisors. The conflicts could be said to have been created because there were two competing objects within teaching practice. The object that mediated the supervisors' actions seemed to be that of assessment. Student teachers felt the pressure to satisfy the object of assessment so that they would have positive outcome at the end of the teacher education programme. This seemed to make teaching practice an activity whose primary goal was the assessment of student teachers. In such a setting, tensions were likely to be high. This seemed to be a crucial part of the system of the training/college and this clashed with elements of others systems such as the student teachers' systems.

The activity setting of supervision, with its emphasis on assessment also seemed to have bred a lot of misunderstanding between the communities involved in teaching practice especially

supervisors and student teachers. In other studies communication between student teachers and college supervisor was often reported to be a problem (Yee, 1969).

Some student teachers thought that supervisors were unnecessarily not observant enough during the supervision sessions. The following sentiments from student teachers alluded to this:

> *The supervisor accused me that I did not attend to pupils who did not participate in the lesson yet it was done. He also said I did not tell the pupils what next lesson would be yet this was done. Pupils even asked me which books to read (student teacher).*

> *I was told to apply knowledge learned in history to everyday life. But the supervisor explained some ideas which are applicable in Bible Knowledge not History. How can I know such things which are not written in History books (student teacher)?*

> *I had a problem to convince a supervisor who accused me of not correcting a pupil while narrating a story yet we are told in English not to correct a pupil because what we are after is communication not verb tense (student teacher).*

The sentiments showed that there were misunderstanding between student teachers and the supervisors. In most cases, student teachers tended to defend their actions during lessons. It would be argued that what was at stake during the post-observation conference was the grade that the student teachers got. Student teachers tried to make justifications of what had gone on in the lessons they had conducted to attain a better grade so that their overall outcomes on teacher education programme were good.

The other misunderstanding was related to the gate-keeping role of supervision. Gate-keeping or determining entrance to the profession was one of the major functions of the activity setting of supervision. Assigning a final grade was exclusively the responsibility of the college supervisor. Two student teachers made the following comments:

> *I was given a zero grade for concluding a lesson a bit late. I thought that was very unfair (student teacher).*

> *Some supervisors are just very critical. Though they would want you to plan and teach in accordance to your ability they fail to accept your view in as far as grading is concerned. The supervisor on Thursday was just very critical and his grading affected me. You can imagine failing to give you best but they just grade you within the same range. It really frustrates and I don't think I will work harder than that (student teacher).*

The misunderstanding may be said to generate resentment between student teachers and supervisors. The pressure to excel in their programme put student teachers and supervisors on a collision course. This epitomized a clash of the college system and the student teacher system as well as the existence of competing goals between the two systems. It could be argued that the majority of student teachers seemed to expect positive remarks for them to appreciate the supervision sessions. This could be because positive remarks could translate to a better grade which eventually was used for assessing the performance of student teachers on their teacher education programme.

8.6.2 Specialization of the supervisors

I found that some student teachers thought that lecturers who supervised them were not subject specialists and therefore unable to objectively assess them. The student teachers thought that such lecturers were not appropriate for supervising their lessons and offering objective support for learning to teach in subjects they were planning to teach at the end of the programme. According to some student teachers, subject methodologies were different and when a lecturer who supervised them had not taught them the methodology or was not a specialist in the subject, supervision raised concerns. A student teacher said:

> *Supervisors are a bit of a problem in that they find difficulties in understanding a lesson in a subject which they do not teach but have been told to supervise (student teacher).*

Another student teacher said:

> *Some supervisors are not conversant with subjects which they do not teach such that it becomes a problem to convince them (student teacher).*

The thinking here suggested that specialist lecturers had to be the ones to supervise lessons. This would bring harmony to the activity setting of supervision and teaching practice in general. Equally, experienced subject specialists were ideal for supervision unlike subject specialists with no experience and no knowledge of the realities of secondary school teaching (Gaynor, 1998). The non-specialist supervisor was thought of not being versed in the values and practices that governed lessons in other subjects. This confirms that there were different values and practices among teacher educators. The different subject contents which student teachers were learning in college seemed to represent different activity settings. Different methodological practices guided the subjects when translated into secondary school curriculum.

I noted in some cases that lecturers who supervised student teachers were secondary teachers who had secured a teaching position in college quite early after graduating, although there was little to ensure that they had solid pedagogical knowledge, appropriate teaching skills, or the ability to act as change agents in teacher education (Gaynor, 1998). In my field notes I made the following observation:

> *I observed that one of the supervisors was known to me from university days. He had only taught in secondary school for few months. He secured a teaching position as an assistant lecturer at the college and reported for duties when student teachers were in secondary schools for teaching practice. However, he was incorporated in the team of supervisors and observed lessons without the help of an experienced member of staff (field notes).*

This observation added weight to the view that some individuals who supervised student teachers were not inducted in the supervision role. Within an activity theory framework, this meant that some members of the college system required to be fully inducted in their newly

found profession before they could supervise student teachers competently. These new members in the community of lecturers also needed to benefit from legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1988) at the college level before they could offer facilitative supervision to the student teachers' systems.

8.7 Innovations to the activity of teaching practice

An activity theory framework is said to be a virtual disturbance and innovation producing machine (Russel, 2002). Innovations present individuals with alternative ways of completing everyday tasks and solving a variety of problems in ways not possible without the innovation. New ways may contain affordances that mediate the actions of the agent, in this case, the student teacher (Wertsch, 1998). Through the process of implementing new approaches into teaching practice, tensions, clashes or contradictions may be reduced during teaching practice. Individuals in an activity system may try to find ways of reducing disturbances that they experience as they carry out activities. The cohort of third year student teachers in this chapter seemed to value the supervision settings of teaching practice as critical reality–definer of their performance.

According to a teaching practice handbook at Masambiro College, third year student teachers were graded during teaching practice and the grades they got contributed to their overall outcome on their teacher education programme. The need for producing innovations in supervision setting therefore, seemed overwhelming. Third year student teachers concentrated on improving supervision of teaching practice as it was critical in determining how they fared in their teacher education programme. Such a move was believed to reduce tension for student teachers and ensure that teaching practice and the inherent supervision were redesigned to promote productive learning experiences for student teachers.

A student teacher, in course of proposing some change to supervision said:

> *The emphasis should not be just on grading our teaching practice. It should be on improving our teaching since teaching practice is meant to help us learn to teach and not show how much of teaching we can do (student teacher).*

Another student teacher said:

> *Supervisors should be facilitators and not assessors. That makes us fear them and tremble when they come to visit us. We always end up disagreeing with them on what they say about my lesson (student teacher).*

Here, supervisors on teaching practice might have stressed the function of assessment during their interactions with student teachers during supervision. The student teachers thought that the role of the supervisor should move away from too much focus on assessment and grading student teachers' performance in class to productive learning experiences where supervisors

assumed a more supportive role. The views from student teachers suggested that they wanted to use the teaching practice especially the supervision setting to access support from supervisors in the school settings.

The student teachers envisioned supervisors as facilitators in the learning process. This could be attributed to views that if supervisors were facilitators, their relative power would be reduced and student teachers would be able to feel free with them and accept constructive criticism from them. The facilitator role could remove some misunderstandings that some student teachers had about supervision. The student teachers might cease to be defensive during post-observation conferences. This would eventually promote productive outcomes from experiences during teaching practice. It would also promote better relations between student teachers and supervisors.

The student teacher perceived that they needed to make sure that supervisors with appropriate credentials supervised them. Certain members of the professional community of lecturers were considered to be ineffective supervisors during teaching practice. A student teacher pointed out:

> *Subject lecturers should be the only ones to be supervising us other than the other lecturers who do not know the methodology of the subjects, other than a tutor of Physics to supervise a History student teacher. This brings confusion because methods in teaching Physics are different from methods in teaching history (student teacher).*

The student teacher above perceived that they needed subject specialists who taught them the subject methodology in college to supervise them. These specialist supervisors were said to share values and practices of the subject matter with student teachers and were more supportive. The use of non-specialist supervisors to supervise student teachers was seen as a disjuncture and student teachers suggested its removal so that teaching practice was more beneficial.

Some student teachers also perceived that supervision could be improved by changing the mentality of supervisors. One student teacher said that supervisors should be open-minded and supportive to student teachers:

> *Supervisors should be open minded and willing to offer constructive criticism and not just condemn my teaching approach. They should realize I am only learning to teach. I have never taught before and there is a lot of pressure on me already. They should help me and not accuse me of failing to teach. Any encouragement is very good because you feel that someone appreciates what you teach other than finger pointing (student teacher).*

The student teacher echoed the need for supervisors as members of the professional community of teachers to exercise their role for the good of teaching practice. The student teacher suggested that supervisors should be aware that student teachers were new in the field

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and most of what they were doing was based on the novice status. Supervisors would become more helpful and supportive from this perspective. This would make the activity setting of supervision more productive for professional development.

Another dimension of change proposed for teaching practice was suggested by college supervisors. This had to do with allowing student teachers to hold plenary sessions after teaching practice where they could share their experiences and come up with possible solutions to the predicaments that they had faced.

Two supervisors made remarks in relation to the needs for plenary sessions. One supervisor said:

> *Teaching practice for finalists should come earlier so that after teaching practice they should meet and share their experiences (supervisor).*

Another supervisor corroborated the one quoted above by saying:

> *A plenary session to be arranged to help student teachers reflect and improve on their teaching. I would call it teaching practice reflections (supervisor).*

It would appear that the proposed innovation was motivated by a belief among some lecturers that student teachers would benefit from sharing their experiences at the end of field experiences. This would promote the sharing of ideas among student teachers about the various experiences they had encountered during the actual teaching practice. In the same way, lecturers, as experienced teacher educators would assist student teachers in understanding and mediating the tensions and contradictions/clashes that they experienced during their field practices. The call for plenary sessions where student teachers share experiences could enhance the link between field experiences and the college system in the sense that what student teachers experienced in the field could be brought to the college for discussions. This could reduce the polarization of teacher education and schools in some way since what student teachers experienced in the school system could be interrogated at college system. This could also enrich not only student teacher's abilities to solve problems in the field but also, promote interaction between the secondary school system and the college system.

8.8 Summary and conclusion

The experiences of student teachers at Limbani secondary school were determined by a number of issues in the school system and settings of teaching practice such as: their views of the school setting; division of tasks in the school; pedagogical issues; community relationship; supervision; and the perceived innovations to teaching practice.

As regards the views of student teachers about the school setting, I found that student teachers took a central role in deciding to go to Limbani secondary school for teaching practice. I observed that student teachers who went to Limbani secondary school viewed some favourable aspects in the school before placement. These positive images influenced them to ask for a placement at the school. Nevertheless, the school exhibited some inadequacies that generated tension among student teachers. The student teachers pointed out shortage of some tools in some subject areas as a source of concern in pedagogical preparation and delivery of classroom actions. The student teachers at the school noted some shortage of tools/artifacts for teaching and learning. The student teachers had some concerns over how to handle some aspects of the subject contents. The number of pupils in class also raised concerns for most of the student teachers. Most student teachers perceived that the intensity of tasks assigned to them were manageable in some situations and unmanageable in others. The unmanageable tasks were attributed to large class sizes and the number of periods student teachers were assigned to teach. These were believed to create tensions with the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy, among others.

The findings showed that the use of learner-centred pedagogy as a teaching methodology was a source of concern for student teachers. The findings attributed the problem of using learner-centred pedagogy to the different practices that guided teaching and learning in the college system and the secondary school system. Some student teachers said that lecturers in college used the lecture method when teaching them how to teach using learner-centred pedagogy, and they were therefore presented with learner-centred pedagogy through teacher-centred approach. While this was normal practice for college teaching, some student teachers perceived that appropriation of learner-centred pedagogy was implicated by the teaching approach used in college. Some student teachers noted that they would apply the teaching approach that was common in the secondary schools where they went as opposed to what they had learned and used during the teaching practice. This showed that the school system tend to have a strong influence on the novice student teachers. It also shows the tendency of the school system to reproduce itself.

The use of learner-centred pedagogy was also implicated by the class size and lack of necessary tools in the school. Some student teachers noted that most pupils were not familiar with the learner-centred pedagogy and could resist its use in their classrooms. This left some student teachers with little option other than use the dominant approach which pupils were familiar with, namely teacher-centred pedagogy. Individual values were also critical in the appropriation and use of learner-centred pedagogy by some student teachers who would use

the learner-centred pedagogy despite the hurdle that teachers faced. A desire to continue using the approach seemed to emanate from values about the benefit of learner-centred pedagogy on pupils. In this case, personal conflict places some student teachers in precarious position in the school system.

The findings also showed that the college and the school did not create any collaborative partnership which could promote teaching practice among student teachers in the school system. This meant that the activity system of school and the college were not connected even though teaching practice was meant to be a bridge between the two systems. This provided the evidence that there was a gap between the systems and this inevitably had an effect of the student teachers. The findings that the school and college did not form collaborative partnership contributed to detachment between school teachers and student teachers. This led to a lack of support from the teachers at the school. The student teachers seemed to be affected by the lack of collaborative partnership between these two activity systems. This was conceptually perceived as a source of tension. The tendency was for most student teachers to operate in isolation or without support in the school system.

The findings from the student teachers at Limbani secondary school also showed that student teachers were affected by the phasing out of the 'cooperating teacher'. The phasing out of the cooperating teacher meant that the college and school systems' virtual triad of student teacher, cooperating teacher and college supervisor was destabilized. The triad has been praised for supporting student. The fact that the cooperating teacher is always available in the school meant that the student teacher may learn a lot about the complexities of teaching in classrooms. This calls for training of teachers for the role of cooperating teachers so that they could be more effective in mentoring student teachers.

It would appear that even though the college had previously used school teachers as cooperating teachers for student teachers, some of the cooperating teachers did not possess the necessary skills of mentors. The absence of cooperating teachers to support the student teachers in the school was also seen as a source of tension and most student teachers were affected as a result. There was no school-based 'expert' on the practical knowledge of teaching to offer them mediational role. The student teachers operated as both novices and 'professional strangers' in the school system as a result of the absence of cooperating teachers.

The other findings in the chapter related to supervision as a component of teaching practice. I found that the student teachers did not view supervision as positive. The student teachers

perceived supervision to be a source of contradiction and tension. The student teachers felt that the dual functions of supervisors as facilitator and assessor were in contradiction. The use of supervision mainly as an assessment tool rather than a supporting tool of teaching practice was a source of psychological tensions for student teachers. I noted that the function that seemed to be dominant in the supervision setting was that of the assessor as opposed to the facilitator role. Since assessment was emphasized the student teachers showed that they were constantly at unease with the remarks from supervisors. The student teachers were also subjected to inappropriately specialized supervisors during supervision settings. According to the Masambiro College student teachers handbook (2003), the object of teaching practice was learning to teach and not demonstrating that they could already teach effectively. The student teachers needed to interact with professionals who could promote learning to teach. However, inappropriately specialized subject methodology supervisors in some instances did not provide that opportunity.

At the level of innovations, I found that the third year student teachers considered a number of changes to teaching practice especially the supervision component. These were based on the experiences of tensions which student teachers had undergone. When there are contradictions or tensions, in an activity system, an activity theory framework seems to be an effective tool for understanding and, if possible, resolving the problem and it prompts better questions for redesigning activity system. The motive that is involved in a particular professional activity specifies what is to be maximized in that setting over other things.

It would appear that the student teachers in the third year of their studies wanted to benefit more from supervision. The student teachers' experiences during teaching practice led them to suggest that supervision be subjected to some changes to ensure that individuals found it more useful. The student teachers' suggestions were corroborated by some supervisors in some cases. They suggested that only specialist lecturers be used to observe and assess them during teaching practice. They also suggested that supervision be changed by ensuring that supervisors played more of facilitator role than the assessor. The findings also showed the need for introducing another setting of plenary sessions for student teachers as a way of bridging the college and secondary school systems. The plenary sessions would offer some kind of feedback to both student teachers and college lecturers.

The findings in the chapter demonstrated some of the major experiences of third year student teachers during teaching practice. The findings offer an understanding of teaching practice as a component of teacher education with reference to third year student teachers. In the next

chapter, I address findings on experiences of second year student teachers during teaching practice. The findings from second year student teachers and third year student teachers are later discussed side by side in **Chapter Ten**.

CHAPTER NINE: RESEARCH FINDINGS ON EXPERIENCES OF SECOND YEAR STUDENT TEACHERS

9.0 Introduction

This chapter constitutes research findings mainly from the second year student teachers placed at Gawani secondary school for teaching practice. Four student teachers who conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school participated in the study. There were three male and one female student teacher at the school. Two student teachers were preparing to become teachers of science subjects and the other two were preparing to become teachers of arts and social subjects. Teaching practice placement at Gawani secondary school was the first ever experience of actual school interaction for second year cohort of student teachers. The chapter provides an analysis and discussion of research findings from qualitative materials collected from the student teachers in relation to their experiences during teaching practice. It addresses similar research questions as those addressed in **Chapter Eight**. From an activity theory perspective, the central questions of student teachers experiences during teaching practice included the following:

(a)   How did activity systems within teaching practice influence the ways in which student teachers developed in teaching?

(b)   How did student teachers experience and think about activity settings of teaching practice?

(c)   How did the conduct of teaching practice explain contradictions/tensions of student teachers?

(d)   How did student teachers and supervisors envision the activity system of teaching practice?

The findings were generated from data collected through semi-structured interviews, follow-up-in-depth interviews, critical incident logs and classroom observations. The semi-structured interviews conducted with some of the lecturers who acted as supervisors provided supplementary data on the experiences of student teachers and the perceived desire for change within teaching practice. Activity theory was a useful theoretical tool for bringing together varying experiences of student teachers within the activity settings of teaching practice (Engeström, 1999).

9.1 Student teachers' views of the school setting

An activity theory framework places emphasis on the setting in which a professional activity takes place because such settings are said to have major implications on how individuals are affected as they carry out teaching actions (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). As pointed out in **Chapter Eight**, activity settings may encourage particular social practices and may also provide constraints that can limit individuals' actions. It was necessary to explore how second year student teachers viewed the secondary school setting where they conducted teaching practice. The activity setting is said to lead subjects to gravitate towards some practices rather than others and this may affect the appropriation of particular tools of carrying out activities (Grossman *et al.,* 1999).

In the study, I found that some student teachers who conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school chose to go to the school of their own volition. This was important because it suggested that there were some underlying reasons that guided them to select the school among many schools that they could choose from. One student teacher commented:

> *I was responsible for deciding where to conduct teaching practice and the college was just there to confirm my choice. I was lucky to be sent to a school of my choice unlike others whose choices were disapproved and were sent to schools they never thought of (student teacher).*

Another student teacher commented:

> *I myself decided on my teaching practice placement and honestly speaking, I do not regret having made this choice because the school is very conducive for teaching practice (student teacher).*

This suggested that some student teachers who went to Gawani secondary school perceived the school as ideal as it offered them opportunities to learn to teach. Even though the school setting motivated student teachers, I found that not all student teachers who went to the school were initially attracted to it. This was important because, in line with an activity theory framework, it implied that settings may be differentially interpreted by individuals depending on the internal images that the school evokes in individuals. A student teacher who had not initially wanted to go to Gawani secondary school commented:

> *In the first place I wanted to go to another school but there they only wanted few student teachers and the competition was very stiff so I lost the competition. I had to go for another choice and there was also a stiff competition and I lost again and after some discussion with those responsible for teaching practice I said alright put me at "Bola" private secondary school but at that school I was found to be the only one so they said we can not be going to that school only to visit you so they said go to Gawani secondary school. I said alright, no problem I will go to there. However, the school is not bad as I thought it would be (student teacher).*

The comments by the student teacher showed that some student teachers conducted teaching practice at schools that they had not initially wanted to go to. I noted that there was competition in some cases which led them to go to schools which were not their first choice.

The idea of competition implied that some student teachers lost out and ended up at schools that they had not specifically considered as ideal. This implied that some student teachers, as the primary subjects of teaching practice did not always have much control of their placement. There were likely to be misalignment between student teachers and the schools where they conducted teaching practice and this could be viewed as a source of tension.

In terms of the geographical location, the school was located near a rural trading centre. The location of the school also evoked different interpretations from student teachers. On the one hand the setting was considered as a source of tension for teaching practice. The comments from a student teacher indicated how student teachers reacted to the location of the school:

> *As for location the school is just near a very busy trading centre and has no fence so that pupils' going out of bounds is the talk of the day. This robs the pupils of their time for studies hence poor performance. Pupils are often found in the trading centre even during class time. This also affects teaching because the pupils hate being given home work assignments. They feel they are supposed to go out to the trading centre and not to work (student teacher).*

The location of the school was also considered convenient for reasons other than teaching practice. The remarks from a student teacher demonstrated how the same school arena was interpreted differently based on student teachers' varied expectations:

> *The school faces a lot of problems as far as teaching and learning resources are concerned. However, it is located at a convenient place, near the trading centre along a tarmac road (student teacher).*

From the remarks of the student teacher above, it could be argued that even though learning to teach was the primary objective of teaching practice, some student teachers were able to view appropriateness of school settings for other reasons. The interpretation of the school location by a student teacher above was a case in point. The student teacher attributed the convenience of the school to factors that could be regarded as not central to learning to teach (i.e. trading centre and the road network).

My own personal observation of the secondary school based on my field notes showed that the school was not in good condition. I observed that:

> *The physical structure of the school showed that the school was not in good condition. The infrastructure appeared old and there were inadequate desks in classrooms. Some pupils were using plastic chairs during teaching and learning. The library at the school did not have adequate books. Student teachers echoed my own personal observations of the school and were of the view that many facilities at the school were not properly functioning (field notes).*

The comments from student teachers corroborated my own personal observations that the school setting was in a state that did not augur well for pupil learning and inherently, teaching practice. Student teachers said:

> *The school is very old and some infrastructures are old, and some have even stopped functioning. Some equipment has been broken down beyond repair. The laboratory has some reasonable materials, however, most of them are very old and broken while others have*

become ineffective. The school does not have enough desks for pupils which made it difficult for me to make a permanent seating plan for pupils. The library also has few books to support me in the teaching practice (student teacher).

Actually there were problems and in most cases there could not be appropriate materials for teaching. For example, when you go to the laboratory maybe you would like to explain a certain concept, a certain idea, you could find that the right equipment is not there and maybe because tomorrow you have to do this and that and you think that ah, maybe I can not find even the right materials around. For example, I was trying to explain force, I could not find the balances, the scales we use to explain, so I did not explain the way I wanted to explain, I did not like that...It was pathetic that I could even lack pair of compasses to draw a circle on the chalk board. When it came to drawing a circle it was really a problem and gave me tough time and I could not know how to do it until I learned to improvise something like using a string and tie to a piece of chalk to represent a constant radius, it was a problem. And when we go to Biology in the laboratory it was found that some chemicals were not there to carry out experiments there were problems because when it comes to carrying out experiments, there is no way that I can improvise these chemicals (student teacher).

As a teacher I had to read widely but I was given common books and they were the same books that pupils had so sometimes it was like we were at the same level with the pupils. I was supposed to know more than the pupils...Teaching practice seemed to have been affected by lack of equipment. The selection of content for senior physical science was a problem due to lack of books (student teacher).

The shared views about the state of the school suggested a number of things. It suggested that student teachers at the school experienced tensions in coming to terms with the practical reality of teaching practice. The state of the school suggested that teaching practice would not progress well due to shortages of pedagogical tools for teaching and learning. Teaching practice as an activity entailed student teachers being able to test their abilities to use various tools available in the social context of schools. Tools were useful to mediate the interactions between student teachers and pupils in the school. However, student teachers were affected by resource constraints. This could be viewed as a source of tension in undertaking teaching practice in the way that student teachers had been prepared by the college system.

The shortage and unavailability of tools implied that the context of the school did not provide appropriate environment for teaching practice. Apart from providing student teachers with non-negotiable tensions, this also hindered their opportunities to have productive experiences (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). I pointed out in **Chapter Three** that student teachers needed to experience productive tensions which could be sources of professional development. Productive tensions ensure student teachers' effective growth towards becoming teachers. However, the context of the school implied that student teachers were exposed to inappropriate tensions which they could not easily resolve. The unavailability of useful tools for learning to teach implied an overly threatening field placement which promotes a great deal of negativism and stagnation in student teachers (Gipe and Richard, 1992).

9.2 Division of tasks to student teachers

In activity theory, subjects come together to perform tasks to achieve desired objects (Engeström, 1987) of the activity system. The tasks that student teachers performed had implications on how they were able to meet the object of teaching practice in the school. As pointed out in **Chapter Four**, objects (or objectives) are looked at as the immediate goals of the subjects involved in a variety of tasks. The immediate object of student teachers for conducting teaching practice had to do with learning to teach. However, the school had teachers who had their own object of teaching pupils. Student teachers did not necessarily belong to the activity system of the school. They were there temporarily and would leave and go back to the college system where they belonged. This suggested that there were two activity systems in the school which were driven by different goals.

I found out that student teachers at the school were assigned tasks which were misaligned to student teachers' immediate objectives of learning to teach but rather in line with the school goal of pupil learning. A student teacher commented:

> *I have been allocated 20 periods per week. I was against this but the school has two streams. This makes it difficult to have one teacher teach one stream while the other teacher teaches the other stream. The periods are manageable but when you have other exercises or tests to mark it is difficult. I think this is too much for successful teaching practice. I think this prevented me from a number of things because I was very busy usually. I would not say I encountered a lot of problems even though I had a lot of preparations to do, a lot of marking to do considering that the classes were big. Now when it comes to giving exercises and marking exercise books, I needed a lot of time and in that very same time I needed to prepare for the next lesson, so that was really tough. I was lacking the ways to properly launch specific topics (student teacher).*

This suggested that the school system may not have been aware of the student teachers' goals or assumed that student teachers had to subscribe to the school goals while they were there. This was a manifestation of a dissonance between objects of two activity systems. It should be remembered that student teachers who conducted teaching practice at the school were in the second year of their studies. They were expected to return to college to complete a third year of studies. Their level of knowledge and skills about teaching was lower than student teachers who were in third year of their studies (see **Chapter Eight**). However, the findings showed that there was no major difference in terms of tasks assigned to both cohorts of student teachers. Again this represented a creation of a single activity system of student teachers from conceivably two different activity systems of third year student teachers with more knowledge and second year student teachers with less knowledge.

It would appear that the policy of streaming pupils in class governed the school system and this tradition could be said to be a source of contradiction. The student teachers were expected to follow the school class structures even though this did not fit in their agenda of

teaching practice. In this respect, the school system expected student teachers to be "teachers" and operate within the 'dictates' of the school system. This seems to agree with an earlier observation (see **Chapter Eight**) that the school system tended to dominate and thin down the student teachers' system with a view of (the school system) reproducing itself. The student teacher system did not appear to have any influence on the structure of classrooms. The student teachers' system became subservient to the school system.

I observed (see **Chapter Eight**) that the college system did not have any special influence on the assignment of tasks to student teachers and appeared to have no influence on the way school systems operated. This apparent lack of influence implied that student teachers were left to the 'whims' of the school system to determine the allocation of tasks. Inevitably, the primary objectives of the school which centred on pupil learning became the primary objective of student teachers at the expense of student teacher professional development.

Another student teacher remarked that even though the number of periods was within manageable range, the sequencing of periods on day-to-day basis presented some source of tension. This was similar to the findings from student teachers in **Chapter Eight**. A student teacher complained:

> *I have 16 periods per week and this is very reasonable. This number was stipulated in the syllabus. The periods are manageable except on one day of the week where I have to teach two periods in each form. The teaching itself has nothing like a problem but the problem involves preparing for work of two classes in a day (student teacher).*

The remarks from a student teacher implied that the tension that the student teacher experienced had to do with requiring student teachers to teach the same subject to two classes on particular days. Importantly, it suggested that student teachers were capable of carrying out preparation for their lessons to a certain extent if teaching practice was going to be a source of productive learning experiences. Too much lesson preparation caused tensions and implied incompatibility with the objective of teaching practice. The school system, however, required student teachers to "teach", and this implied that they follow the school timetable just like the other teachers.

Some student teachers were assigned tasks which they viewed as within reasonable ranges of promoting the objective during teaching practice. However, even with such reasonable tasks, student teachers' source of tension shifted to lack or resources in achieving the immediate object of teaching practice. A student teacher commented:

> *I have 13 periods per week and these are reasonable. Unfortunately, there is limited number of teaching resources available for me to use (student teacher).*

The tension caused by the general lack of teaching and learning tools in the school has been discussed in an earlier section (see **Section 9.1**). The setting of the school was marked by a general lack of teaching and learning artifacts/tools. The implications were that student teachers struggled to experience an 'educative practicum' (Zeichner, 1996) in settings that were viewed as inappropriate environment. Based on these cases relating to tasks of student teachers here, it would appear that the sources of tensions and contradictions were 'endlessly multifaceted, mobile, and rich in variation of content and form' (Engeström, 1999: 20).

9.3 Student teachers and class sizes

The other element related to division of tasks for student teachers had to do with the class sizes in which student teachers had to conduct tasks with the goal of appropriating teaching. Individual classrooms within the school system can be looked at as complex interactions among elements such as student teachers, pupils, instructional practices, learning needs, and larger systems issues such as prescribed curricula. Student teachers were expected to conduct actions in such environments to fulfill the objective for which they were on teaching practice by using specific teaching approaches that they had learned in the college system.

Student teachers were of the view that the numbers of pupils in class at Gawani secondary school exceeded their expectations and inherently, impeded teaching practice. The student teachers commented:

> *I teach form 1 and 3 and there are about 68 pupils in each class. The classes are just too big and this poses problems in class management. There should be 40 pupils because it can be easy to manage and this can ensure effective teaching because I can identify each pupil's problems and assist accordingly (student teacher).*

> *The number of pupils was a problem, like in form 3, I had 94 students in one class and it was a big problem to manage them and in Mathematics whenever I teach them I had to give them some work to mark in class because if I tell them this is take home assignment they may be copying from each other and I may not have a true reflection of the class. They have to do it in class and I had to mark it and see but it was almost impossible to mark 94 note books within just 40 minutes and within that you also had to teach them and so it was really a problem (student teacher).*

> *The problems I encountered for teaching those big classes was that I was failing to finish all the work I had prepared to teach. What would happen is once I teach a section, some pupils would understand, others would not and those that did not understand would be asking questions thereby failing to finish the work I had prepared and also not all pupils would understand what I had taught (student teacher).*

The large classes inhibited some actions that student teachers were expected to carry out to meet the objective of teaching practice in the school system. This implied that class sizes were not ideal and appropriate settings for learning to teach. Student teachers were not able to use some of the theoretical knowledge and skills learned in college system. While student teachers noted that it was important to learn to manage large classes, the sizes of class did not

enhance the use of some of the pedagogical tools that student teachers had learned in college. Large class sizes can be viewed as sources of tension. The constraint that student teachers faced in carrying out assigned actions demonstrated that the school system did not fit within the framework of teaching and learning which guided student teachers' college education.

I also found through the context of large classes that teaching practice at the school did not fully assist student teachers to apply some of the knowledge and skills learned in college. Large classes were blamed for not allowing student teachers to use participatory learning strategies. The following comments from a student teacher portrayed this:

> *I have three classes to teach. The form 3 class has 58 pupils; form 1 classes have 66 and 67 pupils respectively. I feel that the large numbers of pupils are not the right numbers because there are some participatory teaching methods which do not work because of these numbers. I think 40 pupils in each class would be manageable and allow participatory methods (student teacher).*

These findings demonstrated that student teachers had specific images of teaching based on their college courses. There was a general belief that crowded classrooms did not present an appropriate setting of teaching practice. The school presented student teachers with crowded classrooms to teach while the college expected them to apply specific teaching approaches. This tugged student teachers in different directions within their own system and the school system. The large classes were viewed as a hindrance to professional development by student teachers and the college system. On the other hand, student teachers saw smaller classes (of forty pupils) as part of their rationale for being in the school. However, many teachers in the developed world would still consider a class of forty pupils as unacceptably large for effective teaching and learning.

I pointed out earlier (see **Section 9.1**) an arena may have multiple conceptions in people's minds. A student teacher in the school interpreted large class size as facilitating learning to teach especially with regard to managing and controlling pupils. The student teacher remarked:

> *There are 45 pupils in form 3E, 32 pupils in form 3W, 68 pupils in form 1S, 66 pupils in form 1N. These classes are not so big that I can fail to develop. They in fact teach me how to control very big classes. The only problem is that follow up of pupils individually is difficult. I think 40 pupils in a class would be a very good because class management would be easy and individual follow up would be easy (student teacher).*

It would appear that some student teachers perceived large classes as ideal for professional development in some aspects of teaching practice. This thinking might have emanated from the understanding that most classes in many public schools in Malawi have high pupil populations. Student teachers might therefore be products of large classes during primary and secondary education. The large classes in which they learned influenced their apprenticeship

of observation (Lortie, 1975). Their internal representation of a classroom seemed to be that in which they had (themselves) been pupils and this made them accept large classes. Lewin (2000) suggested that even in some colleges of education, the class sizes of student teachers is large. This seemed to apply to some classes at Masambiro College as shown by the distribution of student teachers in some subjects in **Table 9.1** below:

Year/Subject	Biology	Math	Geography	Home Economics	History	English	Chichewa
One	40	40	55	29	26	80	77
Two	25	24	42	38	25	65	64
Three	25	33	43	28	31	40	30

Table 9.1: Distribution of student teachers in various subjects
Source: Masambiro College Lecturer (2007)

The number of student teachers in a class at Masambiro College depended on the course student teachers were preparing to teach. I observed that science courses tended to have few student teachers as compared to language and social studies. These student teachers' populations gave an indication of class sizes in which student teachers were learning at college level. The numbers suggested that some classes were very large and therefore similar to the classes that student teachers had to handle at Gawani secondary school. This showed that there were contradictions within the college system as well in relation to class size. The contradictions were replicated in the secondary school classrooms. It would appear that the contradiction was going on in both systems but the student teachers were not ready to accept the situation in the secondary school classroom. Further, the large classes at the college might have influenced some student teachers to regard large class sizes in school as 'normal' in some way.

Overall, large classes affected the way student teachers used the school experience as a source of an 'educative practicum' (Zeichner, 1996). The classes provided student teachers with multiple complexities in terms of carrying out lesson tasks which they were assigned. The tensions indicated that student teachers' learning experiences with regard to carrying out actions they were assigned did not enhance productive learning.

9.4 Student teachers and pedagogical inconsistencies

The issues surrounding pedagogical inconsistencies were related to the apparent split between theory and practice during college education and the appropriation (or lack of it) of

learner-centred pedagogy among student teachers during teaching practice. From the observations of student teachers, pedagogical theory and pedagogical practice were split and unbalanced during their college teacher education courses. The comments by a student teacher demonstrated the perceived imbalances between pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical practice:

> *The balance between theory and practice is not appropriate because there is more theory than practice. The theory part is fair but the practical is important because it prepares me to teach effectively. Like our group I feel we were given inadequate time for microteaching which was just twice a week for four weeks. I am saying that the period was inadequate because the microteaching is very important in removing the fears of first teaching, creating conducive environment to practice some skills of teaching, providing a ground for advice from the college lecturers to correct my teaching mistakes and uphold the strengths (student teacher).*

There was a general feeling among student teachers that pedagogical theory was dominant while pedagogical practice was minimal. Student teachers felt that they went for teaching practice before they had enough pedagogical practice on the teacher education programme even though they might have had more pedagogical theory.

The student teacher above appeared to view a mismatch between pedagogical theory and practice during college coursework. Other studies found that teacher education concentrated on history, psychology, philosophy, and sociology of education to the detriment of pedagogy or practical experience of classrooms, leaving students ill-prepared for classroom teaching (Lewin, 2000). It would appear that the student teacher thought that the apparent imbalance could not promote pedagogical practices that student teachers were supposed to apply during teaching practice.

It can be argued that the level of appropriation of pedagogical tools was affected in situations where the college did not teach the appropriate pedagogical practice. However, there was a contradiction here: the student teacher wanted the college to prepare them for the practice of teaching but that could not happen until the student teachers were in schools. The student teacher failed to see the split in the activity systems. The college lecturers were there to teach student teachers the theoretical basis of teaching while the student teachers were the ones learning how to translate the theoretical basis into practice. It was not surprising therefore that there was more theory than practice in the activity system of college lecturers.

One specific area where the translation of pedagogical theory into practice seemed vital was the appropriation of learner-centred pedagogy. The findings showed that student teachers did not make full use of learner-centred pedagogy that was recommended in college system. A vignette from observing a student teacher highlighted the way student teachers struggled with applying learner-centred pedagogy.

I observed a student teacher in a senior Physical Science class.

> *The class is taking place in laboratory. The student teacher sends pupils into groups. He continues to deal with individual pupils even though they are in groups. The groups do not seem to be for a particular purpose because they are not given activities to do. The instructions are not given to pupils apart from that of going in groups. In addition, the student teacher does not control group sizes. Pupils are busy individually copying what the teacher is writing while in groups...The student teacher maintains a strange closeness to the chalkboard than the pupils. The teacher later asks questions and allows pupils to answer in chorus...The teacher asks mostly closed questions. These do not really promote problem solving and discussions. He sometimes probes for answers...the student teacher gives many examples on parallelogram, triangles and vector law. The laboratory has unmovable desks so group discussion is hindered. The student teacher talks at length before giving room to pupils. Very few pupils participate in the class discussion. When the time for group feedback comes, pupils raise hands to answer questions. The teacher does not make use of the groups that he asked pupils to go into at the beginning of the lesson (field notes).*

Based on the evidence provided by the actions of the student teacher in the vignette, I concluded that the lesson the student teacher conducted seemed to be based more on teacher-centred pedagogy. I observed that the student teacher struggled in an attempt to apply knowledge of the learner-centred pedagogy in the lesson. The student teacher appeared to apply some signs of learner-centred pedagogy without getting to the bottom of the pedagogical approach. This could be an indication that some student teachers may have appropriated the theoretical aspects of learner-centred pedagogy without the practical know-how of the pedagogy. I asked the student teacher after the observation session about his application of knowledge of learner-centred pedagogy. The student teacher remarked:

> *It was difficult to carry out a lesson based on learner-centred pedagogy because I had inadequate understanding of how it could be applied in real classrooms (student teacher).*

This implied that the student teacher might have failed to translate the practical knowledge relating to learner-centred pedagogy learnt in the college in secondary school classroom. The student teacher might have known what learner-centred pedagogy was in theory but did not know how to practically use it in classroom. This suggested that some student teachers only appropriated surface features of pedagogical tools during teacher education (Smagorinsky, 1995). This appropriation comes about when subjects learn features of a conceptual tool and yet they do not understand how those features contribute to the pedagogical application.

I would like to suggest that in some way, the teacher education programme did not and could not equip student teachers with the practical 'know-how' of the learner-centred pedagogy that it was advocating. This could be traced to an apparent mismatch between theory and practice as demonstrated at the beginning of this section. The apparent mismatch between theory and practice could be viewed as a contradiction between the college system and the student teacher system. The college system seemed to emphasize the intellectual setting of

teacher education while student teachers expected a teacher preparation setting of teacher education.

The student teachers reported their disappointment when they were in their methodology classes in which a lecture method was used to present alternatives to lecture method that student teachers were expected to use during teaching practice (e.g. learner-centred pedagogy). This was manifested in what a student teacher at the school said:

> *The methodology lecturers at college mostly used the lecturing method of which I feel nothing to guide when it comes to recommended secondary school methods of pupil centred. We were encouraged to use participatory methods. That is, the methods used should involve pupils most such as discussion method, role play and others (student teacher).*

The student teacher above suggested that use of lecture method to deliver instructional practices that condemned teacher-centred pedagogy offered not only contradictory messages, but also, it ill-prepared them for learner-centred pedagogy. Without adequate pedagogical knowledge and practice, student teachers could end up using instructional approaches that mimicked college lecture rooms. Russell (1998) noted that as long as some teacher educators advocated innovative pedagogy and did not model, illustrate, and read it as text in their own teacher education classrooms, teacher education reform was bound to fail.

There have been other suggestions that teacher preparation has been affected by the expansion of secondary education and as such lecturers in methodology courses may be forced to use lectures when modelling alternatives pedagogical practices for student teachers (Lewin, 2000). In the case of Gawani secondary school, there were large numbers of pupils in some classes and this implied that student teachers experienced difficulties to implement learner-centred pedagogy. A student teacher commented:

> *The number of pupils was another problem. There were large classes so it was difficult to carry out participatory lessons where pupils took active roles. For example we had 80 students in one class, and we had a problem. It was difficult to use group discussions (student teacher).*

The views of student teacher above suggested that it was not enough to appropriate pedagogical knowledge of learner-centred pedagogy in college, there was also need to have appropriate settings in school systems that favoured pedagogical approaches that student teachers were expected to use. So, even though the pedagogical practice could be available to student teachers, the nature of classes in schools determined the degree to which such pedagogical practices could be applied successfully. In situations where the systems were not bridged, there was bound to be confusion in the application of the favoured pedagogical practice. The large class sizes in the school inhibited the use of learner-centred pedagogy. The student teachers encountered tension organizing pupils in groups for activities that bore the hallmarks of learner-centred pedagogy. The school system could be said to have been

incompatible with the college system vis-à-vis pedagogical preference and class sizes. This was a source of contradiction between school system and student teacher system.

The tension of using pedagogical knowledge around learner-centred pedagogy was further impeded by some members who interacted with student teachers in the school system. I found that some pupils whom student teachers had to conduct lessons with resisted this 'unfamiliar' pedagogical practice. A student teacher commented:

> *I used pupil centred approach in those big classes but the problem was that most pupils were not familiar with the methods that I was using. Most pupils were not exposed to participatory methods and when I said pupils should go in groups and discuss topics, others would refuse to share the outcome of group work with the rest of the class because most of them are used to the teacher centred methods and it was difficult for them to explain their work to the rest of the class. This made my work difficult. I think pupil centred method is good because each and every pupil is active while with the teacher centred method, other pupils would do other things in class while you teach. The pupil centred makes sure every pupil has a role to play in class. For me in form 1, it was not working perfectly because it was difficult for pupils to understand concepts unlike in form 3...the other teachers in the school used teacher centred maybe because pupil centred consumes a lot of time and most pupils do not take group activities seriously (student teacher).*

The comment above shows that some pupils might have been unfamiliar with the approach since they were used to being taught by teachers who used the teacher-centred approach. I noted that some classes had pupils who had not developed the basic skills of teaching and learning at secondary level. This meant that the effort of student teachers to use learner-centred pedagogy was resisted by the very people who were expected to benefit from it. As a result a teacher education programme did not have major impact on classroom practice. Even though the learner-centred pedagogy did not seem to work, student teachers pointed out that it was a useful approach in making sure that pupils were active during a teaching and learning process.

In addition the practice by the other teachers in the school did not appear to advocate the learner-centred pedagogy. A student teacher commented:

> *The other teachers did not seem to use pupil centred approach; I thought it was teacher centred throughout. I think when I finish teaching practice, I feel like it is hard to be honest because sometimes I could feel like, alright, I have experienced it and sometimes I could follow the teacher centred approach and it could not really work and when I go with this pupil centred approach it could brilliantly work but now this learner centred it also needs some creativity and some hardworking spirit in the teacher...I really feel student teachers use the pupil centred approach because of supervision (student teacher).*

The student teachers observed that the other teachers in the school used teacher-centred instructions. It would appear that the school system and its deep-seated practices favoured teacher-centred pedagogy. This demonstrated the existence of school system with its inherent social practices of teaching and learning which were conceivably different from student teachers' system.

I also found out from supervisors who thought that student teachers' school practices were affected by teachers in the school. A supervisor commented:

> *Some student teachers utilize the practices learned in college but not all because of the influence from old timers. If they interacted with hardworking teachers in the field, they utilize the practices and experiences. The opposite is true if they were exposed to lazy teachers who feed them wrong information (supervisor).*

The school curriculum was also implicated for being too congested and examination-oriented and as such, it affected student teacher's use of learner-centred pedagogy. One of the lecturers who supervised student teachers commented:

> *Student teachers do not apply much of the ideas such as pupil-oriented lessons and other skills and methods learnt in college in schools. This is because our secondary school curriculum is congested and examination oriented hence student teachers also focus on examinations and their results (supervisor).*

The nature of the school curriculum meant that student teachers struggled to balance their lessons so that they covered most of the syllabus while at the same time ensure that learner-centred pedagogy was used. It appeared that passing the national examinations was viewed as the favourable outcome by both the school teachers and pupils. The teaching approach that was conceivably favoured for an examination-oriented curriculum appeared to be teacher-centred pedagogy. In this sense, it could be argued that the context of teaching practice did not fit with the realities of pupil learning in terms of the role of "external" forces such as national examinations on pupil learning. This suggested that the school adapted to external pressures and this brought tensions in the activity system of student teachers as they still had to meet the requirements that lecturers had set for them, such as conducting lessons using learner-centred pedagogy.

The student teachers might have felt frustrated that the school system and its inherent practices were not aligned to their thinking in line with the college system. The practices in the school appeared to become the reference point for student teachers and eroded some of pedagogical knowledge and practice learned in college. Some of the pedagogical knowledge learned in college seemed to have no major influence on the actions of other teachers and the pupils seemed to resist them. This implied that some of student teachers' pedagogical orientations advocated in college were dissimilar to the popular practice within the school system. This showed that even though the college system made all attempts to prepare the student teachers in a particular way, the school system tended to have a dominant effect on what student teachers were able to do in the school system. This created tension and contradictions for student teachers and affected their thinking and actions during teaching practice.

9.5 Community relationships in the school

The concept of community is significant in an activity theory framework. It relates to the theoretical view that members of colleges and schools operate as communities of practice. A community of practice involves more than the knowledge and skills associated with undertaking teaching actions and tasks. Members are involved in sets of other inherent relationships. Members get organized around a particular area of knowledge and this accords them a sense of joint enterprise and identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). For a community of practice to function it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories (Lave and Wenger, ibid). The interactions involved, and the ability to undertake larger or more complex activities and projects through cooperation, bind people together and help to facilitate relationships. However, in complex activity systems there will be competing goals, limited resources, differing values, and a variety of desired outcomes among members of a community (Engeström, 1999).

Student teachers benefit a great deal in a school where they are formally accepted as part of the community of teachers. This promotes experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1988). Experiential learning and peripheral participation imply a social and psychological situatedness of the activity of teaching practice. These are also key forces of mediation within activity theory.

9.5.1 'Disengaged relationships' between student teachers and teachers

A 'disengaged relationship' implied that student teachers could not be supported and guided appropriately by the 'expert practitioners' in the school system. The 'disengaged relationships' suggested that detachment existed between student teachers and the teachers. In 'disengaged relationships', the school teachers adopted an attitude of letting student teachers have classrooms rather than teachers actively facilitating the activities of student teachers in classrooms.

Several comments from student teachers portrayed an existence of 'disengaged relationships'. All four student teachers at the secondary school commented on this by saying:

> *I wanted help from the classroom teacher with classroom management skills and help with identification of some good books. There has been no more help other than making me feel welcome before pupils and identification of certain important books (student teacher).*

> *The subject head was not cooperative and refused me to observe his teaching during the first week of my teaching practice. However, he acted as a bridge between me and the pupils when there were some grievances as regards to my teaching and their learning (student teacher).*

> *My subject head for Biology was uncooperative because he did not give me details about the class's general norms and he refused me to observe his lessons last week (student teacher).*

There were situations when the head of department in certain cases could run away from what he was supposed to be doing. I wanted to see him teaching so that I see the general picture of teaching at this school as is recommended by the college, he kept eluding and I started teaching without knowing how I should teach. This affected me because, on first day, I had problems, I did not know the pupils' expectations (student teacher).

The student teachers seemed to want to get some guidance and support on classroom activities. However, the 'disengaged relationship' meant that student teachers were not able to get the most out of the support and guidance. The detachment between the student teachers and the other teachers implied that legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1988) and professional socialization (Merton, 1957) were hindered. The student teachers could not benefit fully from 'professionals' in the school system.

Some researchers (Zeichner, 1996) suggested that the role-model provided by teachers in the school has great influence on student teacher development. Zahorik (1988) found that the support and guidance was essential for professional development of student teachers. I noted that teachers at the school were reluctant to be observed by student teachers as part of the process of learning to teach by student teachers. This could be explained as a rejection of bringing student teachers in the community of practice of the practicing teachers. It also suggests that teachers at the school may have perceived that student teachers would not learn anything from them because they belonged to differing activity systems. In a way, student teachers who were detached from the school system could not be regarded as legitimate members of the school.

The limited support implied that student teachers did not have opportunity to learn to teach from the 'expert practitioners' in the school. The 'expert practitioner' was carrying the social-cultural-historical repertoire of teaching but did not share it with new entrant in the profession. However, the school teachers may not have considered themselves as appropriate to be the role-models of student teachers for other reasons. They might have considered themselves as not part of the teacher education programme which the college was offering. This could be due to the lack of collaborative partnership between the college and the schools as discussed in the previous chapter. This also indicated a different perspective of professionalism by individuals who were thought to be 'expert practitioners' too. This seemed to make sense based on the fact that student teachers and other teachers in the school held different beliefs about pedagogical practices as pointed out earlier on (see **Section 9.4**).

In addition, I had noted (see **Chapter Eight**) that the school teachers were not trained for the role of mentoring student teachers. In situations where student teachers found themselves in 'disengaged relationships', they had to operate in isolation most of the time. This meant that

they did not have much dialogue on professional matters and were metaphorically left on their own to 'sink or swim' in their professional development (Olson and Osborne, 1991). As I had noted in the previous chapter, the phasing out of 'cooperating teachers' (see **Chapter Eight**) affected how relationships between teachers and student teachers could be established. The phasing out of 'cooperating teachers' created a situation where student teachers did not have formally designated members in the school to guide their entry in the community of teachers. The student teachers at Gawani Secondary School may have felt that they were left to deal with problems they faced during classroom practice in private.

In their former roles, 'cooperating teachers' were expected to provide guidance and encouragement needed by student teachers to allow them to experience productive learning in the school (see Masambiro College teaching practice handbook). This was reflected in the comments by a student teacher who said:

> *Unfortunately, there are no longer cooperating teachers and I can feel the effect in many ways. Cooperating teacher should advise me on how to deal with certain discipline cases and on which teaching approaches work best with the concerned class. The cooperating teacher can introduce me to all aspects of school life so that I am aware of what to expect. In most cases, there is no one that I can depend on for help. I do not know whether other teachers are interested to help me and I fear to approach them (student teacher).*

The absence of cooperating teachers in the school meant that the student teachers' activity system lacked an important element in the school community to offer them support as well as provide a bridge between the school system and the student teachers' system. A college supervisor corroborated the comments from a student teacher by pointing out that the support that student teachers received was generally not good based on the fact that cooperating teachers were no longer available. The supervisor said:

> *The support student teachers receive is generally not good, especially this year because the token amount of money which the college used to give the cooperating teachers has been removed. This also means that there is no one in the school who can formally work to assist student teachers (supervisor).*

In theory, cooperating teachers are responsible for maintaining a level of expectations of the student teacher in terms of professionalism, appearance, attendance and effort. They introduce student teachers to pupils and school personnel. They set aside some time to talk with student teachers. They share their philosophy of education with student teacher and suggest materials and strategies, provide appropriate information about classroom pupils, give frank, developmental feedback, and help student teachers to put their school observations and experiences into positive perspectives. They prepare student teachers for formal teaching by demonstrating teaching techniques for them to observe, and by facilitating their observations in other teachers' classrooms. Within activity theory,

'cooperating teachers' would be useful in bridging the gap between the differences in the school system and the college system. They were also important in mediating the tensions student teachers experienced in the school system due to their novice status.

In situations where 'disengaged relationships' existed, student teachers felt isolated from other professional settings that were perceived to be sources of productive learning as evident in the views from a student teacher below. A student teacher remarked:

> *There was a situation where form two pupils had a row with the headmaster, they wanted to cheat during their examinations and the headmaster was stopping them from doing that so they had to go and attack the headmaster at his house so when it came to exercising some disciplinary measure on the pupils we were not included in that. So it was like it happened and we had to find out from other teachers what had happened to them so we cannot have those skills to handle discipline cases...when it comes to these other issues they would go outside the staffroom, under the mango tree and discuss some critical issues leaving us in the staffroom. So it was like why is it that when they want discussions they do it outside leaving us alone in the staffroom...This other time, my friend had to say anyway I will go there to see what they are discussing so he had to go there but upon his arrival they stopped discussing whatever they were discussing and changed a topic. Maybe they did not want us to be fully incorporated in the way they run the school (student teacher).*

This showed that some student teachers at Gawani secondary school were exposed to secondary school subculture of cliques. The teachers at the school formed and used these cliques to advance their thinking about school matters such as discipline issues. Even though cliques could be informal, they tended to provide meaningful sources of professional socialization among teachers. The remarks from the student teacher above signified the existence of cliques among teachers from which the student teachers were excluded. The student teachers felt that they were sidelined from processes of decision making in the school because some decisions were made by cliques of teachers. They were possibly isolated based on their status of learners and also because they possibly would be in the school for a short period of time and as such, they might not have had the interminability of purpose that other teachers in the school system shared. This suggests that the student teachers may have only been involved in the 'front stage' (see Ryan, 1986) of the school and not the deeper issues of whole school management, as such, they had to 'operate on the basis of a radically simplified conception of teaching' (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1989: 39). This contradicted the assertion that teaching practice was meant to be a multifaceted activity where the student teachers interacted with many aspects of teaching and learning.

Some student teachers also felt that some degree of involvement in the other aspects of the school apart from teaching was helpful for them to apply theoretical concepts that they had learned in college. The student teachers referred to 'being teacher on duty' as one of the productive ways of experiencing school leadership and management. However, a

'disengaged relationship' hindered this. Two student teachers expressed their concern by stating:

> *There was a tradition to choose and put three teachers on duty during a week and they had to handle disciplinary cases, exits to pupils, but I was not incorporated in any so I thought I did not benefit. This happened because they started incorporating some of us in these activities very late. Had it been they started incorporating us in the first week all of us would have been incorporated. I was affected by this in a way that whenever it came to disciplinary issues I had problems on how to handle them because I would always say I do not know how to handle them, then I would say, anyway let me refer them to those who are on duty (student teacher).*

> *Unfortunately, I was never a teacher on duty while at my school. I missed the opportunity of learning skills on how to encounter aggressive pupils because some pupils are really aggressive and when encountering them you need to take a certain angle so that you negotiate the problems properly so I missed that (student teacher).*

'Disengaged relationships' meant that some student teachers did not have the opportunities to be 'teachers on duty'. In a sense, this implied that some of the theoretical issues around school leadership that student teachers learned in college were not put to any meaningful practice during school placement. In fact, some student teachers pointed out that their roles in the school were largely linked to classroom activities. One student teacher remarked:

> *The other teachers respected us although not to a level like a fulltime teacher. They only appreciated we had come to help them in their work and were happy for that (student teacher).*

The student teacher appeared to have been predominantly confined to the classroom context. This could have hindered student teachers to develop some useful practices which they needed to master during teaching practice. Supervisors in the study provided the perceived effects of 'disengaged relationship' between student teachers and other teachers in the school. They noted that student teachers experienced unproductive learning experiences in various areas as a result of that. The various comments from supervisors in relation to a 'disengaged relationship' were:

> *Poor relationship has negative effect on student teachers as they lack full support from the school administration and sometimes they are overloaded...This may lead to poor performance if time is lost when solving the problem...Student teachers may lack motivation because of lack of resources or unruly pupils...The student teachers are not assisted effectively for them to be real teachers...these problems tend to lower their output in delivering the lesson...Student teachers may be discouraged in the profession (various supervisors).*

The effects of 'disengaged relationships' suggested that student teachers experienced tensions of various types in the school system. Supervisors suggested that as a result of 'disengaged relationships', student teachers could be overloaded, could perform poorly, and could feel demotivated in their professional development. Such demotivation could cause student teachers to withdraw from teaching based on similar findings which suggest that demotivation is one of the causes of attrition among teachers (Kyriacou, 1991).

By examining the activity system and the way it influenced how the student teachers and school teachers related, it became apparent that student teachers and the school teachers were largely not aligned with each other. This affected student teachers' professional development. This indicated that some student teachers in the study had unproductive experiences that hindered learning to teach. Some student teachers lacked the support of the 'expert practitioners'. From the evidence provided, it is safe to say that 'disengaged relationships' had some negative effects on the teaching practice experiences of student teachers in their professional developmental needs. In this way, not all the objectives for which student teachers had to carry out teaching practice in the school were met and that was a cause for concern.

9.5.2 'Engaged relationships' between student teachers and teachers

On the other hand, some student teachers enjoyed some form of 'engaged relationships' in some instances with members of the school teaching community. This relationship was perceived useful in dealing with tensions during teaching practice. Student teachers noted that some teachers were vital in providing support and guidance and so, bridged the gap between the differences of the student teacher's system and the school system. In engaged relationships, student teachers and members of the school teaching community shared useful information about teaching. Engeström (1987) calls this *expansive learning* or learning at the school systems level. Two student teachers commented of 'engaged relationships' in the following ways:

> *The other teachers, like my head of department was helpful because he could source some materials since I didn't know the places around, he was there ready to help me. He said if you want some materials let me know if I can help (student teacher).*
>
> *I did find a role model in the school, the way he did things was just okay, on presentation of notes, he was not a rigid man, he was flexible with the syllabus, so that was beautiful and the pupils would understand him well. He was able to provide help to me when I asked him (student teacher).*

The student teachers quoted above seemed to benefit from 'engaged relationships' during teaching practice. In this relationship, the student teachers got support and guidance as they engaged in teaching and learning actions in the school. This relationship suggested that student teachers could experience 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Wenger, 1988), i.e. learning to interpret classrooms alongside more 'expert practitioners'.

The 'engaged relationships' promoted professional dialogue and learning between student teachers and other teachers in the school. The student teachers who formed 'engaged relationships' were exposed to the organizational aspect of teaching through formal and informal situations in the school. This could provide a sense of belonging to a community of

practice of teachers. This also mediated their professional development through legitimate peripheral participation (see Wenger, 1988) and experiential learning (see Kolb, 1984).

Furthermore, the student teachers could practice some of the leadership/administrative knowledge and skills they had learned in college system through involvement in committees within the school's system. This was evident from the remarks of a student teacher who said:

> *I remember this other time I was included in the graduation protocol committee whereby we were responsible to see what will happen to make the graduation colourful, so it was like we were meeting, discussing what we can do in preparation of graduation. We have to see what, say, the decorations committee can do to make the graduation colourful, and the food committee, so I was in that group. My involvement in this committee helped me as it shaped my leadership skills whereby while I was there I was able to see how people can organize themselves in groups whereby they are with other people. I had to emulate something from them (student teacher).*

The student teacher perceived that involvement in extracurricular committees in the school offered them the opportunity of the development of skills and knowledge that teachers needed. The activity exposed the student teacher to the realities of team work and division of tasks. In a way, 'engaged relationships' brought some student teachers to the fold of the school system. The teachers who offered support to some student teachers provided some kind of bridge between the school system and the student teachers. This could minimize the level of tensions which student teachers could experience. The student teachers who had the benefit of engaged relationships could be viewed to have had appreciated the multifacetedness of the school system. This also related to the view expressed by a supervisor in **Chapter Eight** that student teachers needed to be involved in extra-curricular activities (see **Section 8.3**).

By examining 'engaged relationships' in the school, it becomes apparent that some student teachers and the school teachers were aligned with each other and this was perceived as positive step for professional development. The 'engaged relationships' influenced the student teachers' social-professional and classroom learning in the school. The student teachers were offered support and guidance by 'expert practitioners' and this seemed to minimize some tensions and concerns of student teachers.

9.5.3 Pupils and student teachers' relationships

The other forms of relationships in the school were those noted between student teachers and pupils. It is important to point out that pupils in the school system were the primary reference point for the actions that both student teachers and other teachers performed. Pupils were seen as direct beneficiaries of the outcome of the actions of student teachers and were also critical reality-definers of student teacher's self (Riseborough, cited in Bullough *et al.,* 1991).

Inevitably, pupils' relationships with student teachers had effects on the experiences of student teachers.

The relationships between student teachers and pupils in the professional classroom setting were not always smooth. The relationships related to division of tasks, authority and status. Some student teachers noted that the level of respect and authority they had was not the same as that of other teachers. I found that there were a number of dynamics within the poor relationships that student teachers encountered. This was evident in the comments from two student teachers:

> *I was teaching and suddenly two pupils started squabbling over triviality to an extent of overlooking my authority. I tried and tried to talk to them and control them but it could not work until an hour later. This made me think I am not cut out for a teacher (student teacher).*

> *There are few pupils who still misbehave in class thereby disturbing the lessons. They make a lot of noise and when I speak to them, they do not want to listen to me. They only fear when I tell them that I am going to report to the class teacher or the school head (student teacher).*

Some pupils challenged the authority of the student teachers in the school by not paying attention or listening. This affected student teachers' pedagogical activities in the classrooms, diverting their attention away from conducting lessons to dealing with discipline issues. Some pupils seemed to misbehave as a way of displaying that they did not respect student teachers. In the instances presented above, the student teachers faced tension in relation to developing an identity of teacher (Britzman, 1991) and learning to manage pupils' behaviour (Bullough, 1989).

An examination of the situations in which student teachers perceived that pupils misbehaved demonstrated that pupils may not have regarded student teachers as professional teachers. This was revealed where pupils behaved well when student teachers threatened to report them to other teachers in the school. A student teacher noted:

> *Pupils would only fear when I tell them that I am going to report them to the class teacher (student teacher).*

This implied that some student teachers did not appear to command the same level of authority and status as the other teachers in the school. This probably confirmed that student teachers needed a great deal of support from other teachers in the school to manage classrooms. It would appear that other teachers in the school were respected as such they were able to infuse discipline in classrooms handled by student teachers. This suggests that the pupils in the school system saw two different types of teachers and accorded differing levels of respect and status to the two groups. However, the student teachers wanted to be viewed in the same way the other teachers were being viewed. The discrepancy in the way the student teachers were viewed created challenges for some student teachers in carrying out

some teaching actions. The explanation that pupils only behaved when a student teacher reported them to another school teacher could be an indication that the school belonged to the other teachers and student teachers may only have been 'professional strangers' in the system. As 'professional strangers', student teachers had to leave the school at the end of teaching practice. They were also 'professional strangers' because they had not qualified as teachers.

In other cases, indiscipline was perceived to emanate from student teachers' actions in classroom context. I noted that some student teachers departed from what appeared to be the norm of the school system, such as giving tests in some instances. A student teacher complained:

> *Pupils were refusing to take a test from the chalkboard. They wanted me to print the examination for them. I was not given paper by the head teacher so I could not do that. This affected the conduct of the test (student teacher).*

The reaction by pupils to student teachers' 'deviation' from a school practice was viewed as indiscipline from the perspective of some student teachers. It would appear that the student teacher considered the reaction of pupils of resisting to take an examination from the chalkboard as indiscipline. This reaction seemed to have been caused by the student teacher's failure to follow a school practice with regard to giving tests on paper. This showed that in some cases, student teachers might have misconstrued indiscipline. The inability of the school to give student teachers papers so that they could print examinations displayed that there might have been another issue at stake. It demonstrated that the school system had a particular time when they could administer examinations. They did not want to depart from that for the sake of the student teachers. The school system was trying to maintain the *status quo* and student teachers faced some tension to fit into that. For the student teacher, giving out an examination was integral to teaching practice and it did not matter when, where and how they gave out examinations.

Based on the observations in the section, student teachers and pupils related at different levels in the school system. Pupils seemed to display misbehaviour in some cases, when relating to student teachers in classroom professional settings. The misbehaviour seemed to be partly due to the dynamics between student teachers and pupils. Within activity theory this suggested that pupils might not have recognized the student teacher's status in the school in the same way that they respected other teachers in the school system. The division of tasks also touches on the authority and status that members in the community assume (Engeström, 1987). Pupils saw split activity systems and accorded varying levels of respect to student

teachers and other teachers. Some student teachers therefore had to deal with issues of maintaining discipline among pupils who viewed them as different from the other teachers.

I found that in terms of social relationships, some student teachers tended to be closer to pupils than teachers. The student teachers' closeness to pupils was seen as not conforming to the norms of teaching. A student teacher, for instance said:

> *We looked like boys, very unprofessional anyway, in most situations we would jump from professional side to friendship when interacting with pupils so the kind of mixing with pupils was not strict. I was very friendly with pupils but maybe professionally it was not okay (student teacher).*

It would appear that some student teachers and some pupils were closer in social settings as opposed to professional settings. The student teachers might have felt closer to pupils to establish themselves as part of the school system and also because they seemed to be driven by similar goals even though they belonged to different systems. Both were undergoing some form of educational training albeit at different levels. The perceived common psychological dispositions between student teachers and pupils seemed to bring them closer. Such closeness contradicted the professional norms of pupil-teacher relationship. Teachers were expected to maintain some degree of decorum and aim at building appropriate rapport and social distance with the pupils' activity system.

The apparent inability by some student teachers to fit in the professional expectations of the school also suggests that they had not fully appropriated the norms that governed professional teachers. This implied that student teachers experienced professional and personal identity clash within the activity system of the school. It can be argued that student teachers were in a process of transition from one role to another and the shifting of role positions from one to another was a source of tension. The student teachers might have wanted to feel as part of the learning system (college) and this clashed with professional norms (school). This was perceived as a source of unorthodox relationships between some pupils and some student teachers.

9.6 Activity settings of supervision

Supervision was one of the distinct activity settings of teacher education programmes. It had its own specific motive, structural features, set of relationships and resources for teaching practice. In the previous chapter, the way student teachers experienced supervision suggested multiple effects on teaching practice. The findings from second year student teachers in this chapter were not very different from those in the previous chapter.

Lecturers from the college took on roles of supervisors and observed student teachers as they conducted lessons. The visits by lecturers for supervision generated a number of tensions and contradictions for student teachers. At the same time, supervision also generated positive feelings among student teachers. Student teachers were concerned with 'overly critical supervision'. In the second place, student teachers were concerned with 'contradictory expectations of supervisors'. In the cases of 'overly critical supervision', 'contradictory expectations of supervisions' and improper attitude of some supervisors, it may be said that the setting of supervision was constructed differently by student teachers and supervisors. Student teachers also commented on what they felt were 'positive experiences of supervision'. This other setting of student teachers' experiences of supervision augured well with effective supervision (see Zahorik, 1988). The overall experiences of student teachers during supervision could be related to the element of dissonance as well as professional development within teaching practice.

9.6.1 Overly critical supervision

The student teachers who gave views in relation to 'overly critical supervision' were not reporting positively about the feedback from supervisors. Three student teachers who felt that they had experienced 'overly critical supervision' remarked:

> *The supervisor picked holes in the objectives of my lesson plan. I was confident the objectives were fine. The supervisor condemned my chalkboard organisation very much. This made me think teaching is so great an art only skilled people can manage it (student teacher).*
>
> *The supervisor's remarks were just a mockery and not a true reflection of my teaching. This embarrassed me such that I lost confidence in myself. This was so because the supervisor was just busy criticizing me but did not even give any positive remark, even the rare remark on dressing smartly (student teacher).*
>
> *The supervisor accused me for not using much of the teaching and learning materials more especially charts when teaching, yet we were only given seven chart papers and they were already finished. When I tried to explain this to him he did not accept it so that his remarks on the observation form did not change (student teacher).*

The 'overly critical supervision' related to situations in which the student teachers perceived that supervisors were only concentrating on condemning lessons that they observed without necessarily offering any encouragement, guidance or support. This seemed to leave student teachers with low confidence and a sense that teaching was too complex an activity. The student teachers did not seem to get any positive feedback from supervisors, let alone, support on how to mediate the objectives of teaching practice. If the student teachers got appropriate feedback, they did not view it strongly to report it. In some cases, student teachers felt that supervisors did not consider the constraint which they faced in the school when making their remarks. In other words student teachers felt that supervisors did not fully appreciate the different activity systems of the college and the school when making remarks

about student teachers' lessons. This appeared to affect student teachers as they thought that their lesson preparation and delivery in the school were affected by the unavailability of resources.

Importantly, 'overly critical supervision' did not appear to promote a socio-cultural perspective of learning to teach. According to socio-cultural perspectives of activity theory, learning is a process of appropriating tools for thinking and acting that are made available by social agents who initially act as interpreters and guides in the individual's cultural apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990). In the case of student teachers, the social agents in the form of supervisors could be said to have not offered guidance and appropriate interpretations from which student teachers could appropriate tools of thinking as developing teachers. Supervision did not focus on the process of supporting appropriation as interpreted by the student teachers.

9.6.2 Contradictory supervision

The second source of tension for student teachers during supervision was caused by what was viewed as 'contradictory supervision'. The activity setting which fitted the description of 'contradictory supervision' was where some student teachers perceived that the messages coming from supervisors were not aligned to the object-directed activities of teaching practice. The student teachers reported negatively about the feedback from supervisors. Some student teachers felt that there were inconsistencies in the comments that supervisors made during supervision.

The following statements from student teachers portrayed 'contradictory supervision' as perceived by student teachers:

> *Some supervisors come up with different formats of writing lesson plans. This becomes a problem because once one sees that you have written the lesson plan with a different format from what he or she knows they mark you wrong (student teacher).*

> *Some supervisors were telling us to do things which the other supervisor had said we should not do. They would say maybe what the other supervisor told you were not right but adhere to this I am telling you. Some would tell us to have consolidation after the conclusion in the lesson plan. So we did not know which is which (student teacher).*

> *At college there was this situation whereby we were taught that as we were teaching we do not have to write objectives on the chalkboard because the pupils have the tendency of copying everything so they can end up copying the objectives and once they notice that you have not tackled any objective they may end up being demoralized so we are advised not to write objectives but when we went there a certain supervisor had to come and say it would have been better if you wrote those objectives so that pupils should really see them. So it was like I was saying which is which. So I do not know who is right or why this one told us this while the other one told us that (student teacher).*

The three student teachers were affected by the contradictory messages from supervisors. Inconsistent comments made student teachers feel confused about the object-directedness of

teaching practice. They felt unsure about the expectations of individual supervisors who observed them. This demonstrated that supervision was not clearly defined in terms of the expectations of some supervisors and student teachers.

I also found that inconsistent comments could have come about as a result of student teachers being supervised by non-specialists supervisors. The following statements from student teachers and supervisors portrayed the inconsistencies:

> *Some supervisors found it difficult to handle other subjects hence either students are given conflicting advice or are unfairly graded (supervisor).*
>
> *Different supervisors who were not specialists in the subject would supervise you. For example a mathematics methodology supervisor would visit a social studies class and give conflicting information (student teacher).*

As noted in the previous chapter, non-specialist supervisors were seen as unhelpful in enhancing student teacher's professional development. The involvement of non-specialist supervisors in supervision generated conflicting information. It demonstrated that the activity setting of supervision, as observed by student teachers was open to multiple construal and therefore likely to generate contradictions. The individual construction of the activity setting of supervision evoked distinctly different understandings based on supervisors' histories. The histories were based on subject methodology knowledge of individual supervisors. The different construal of supervision was manifested in episodes of contradictory remarks which supervisors made during observing student teachers. This implied that even though supervisors belonged to the same activity system of teacher educators, they also belonged to subject-led subsystems which encouraged (and discouraged) particular ways of thinking and teaching. There appeared to be no mutually agreed-upon mode of operation within different subject settings in which student teachers were expected to carry lessons.

It would appear that some supervisors were unaware of the competing activity settings within different subjects in the teacher education system. They seemed to operate from what appeared to be a simplified activity setting of their subject specialization without appreciating the diversity of instructional approaches in the different subjects which they were not specialists in. This was a cause of concern between student teachers system and supervisors' system.

9.6.3 Attitudes of supervisors

On another level, inconsistencies were manifested through the supposedly inappropriate behaviour of some supervisors towards some student teachers. One of the participants in the study suggested that some supervisors harboured ill-feelings towards some student teachers

and used supervision to mete out some form of emotional distress to student teachers. A member on the supervision team remarked:

> *Some supervisors take it [supervision] as time to hit back at student teachers due to personal differences. They tend to deliberately offer contradictory comments so that student teachers feel bad (teaching practice coordinator).*

The vengeful approach during supervision occurred in contexts that did not seem to adhere to professional norms of teaching practice. It would appear that some supervisors might have made negative remarks to student teachers based on what I regard as personal issues which were not related to teacher education. This suggested that supervision was prone to being inadvertently influenced by personal feelings. This clash of the personal and professional aspects in supervisors affected the student teacher system. The clash of the professional and personal 'self' of some supervisors did not promote object-directedness of teaching practice as held by the college system. It raised concerns for not only student teachers but also other supervisors as well.

9.6.4 Positive supervision

The activity setting of supervision which was seen as embracing 'positive supervision' related to the views of student teachers which portrayed the relationship between student teachers and supervisors in a positive light. Student teachers positively remarked:

> *At first I was doubtful about my capabilities but I found that things were not the way I thought they were before. This was because some lecturers commented positively about my lessons. I have learnt that teaching professionally demands a lot of experience as such I do not have to worry so much when I goof in certain areas (student teacher).*

> *The supervision experiences have affected me in the decision to become a teacher in such a way that it has boosted my morale of becoming a teacher through comments of encouragement from the supervisor. It has equipped me with knowledge about what a good teacher should be like (student teacher).*

> *Some of the supervision experiences have given me confidence that I can really become a professional teacher. The supervisions have helped me by providing practical advice on how I can conduct myself as an effective, hard working and professional teacher (student teacher).*

The student teachers reported positively about the feedback from supervisors in this case. The views implied that teaching practice and its inherent supervision was directed towards learning to teach in the school. The student teachers were contented with lecturers offering constructive direction, guidance and support for improved practice. This seemed to foster appropriation of good practice of teaching from the 'expert practitioners'. These experiences were viewed as positive for professional development. The student teachers who said they had positive experiences of supervision derived satisfaction from supervisors' remarks. It would appear that supervision marked by positive experiences helped to attain the objects of teaching practice. The experiences were seen as non-threatening as compared to other

situational settings in which student teachers were heavily criticized and exposed to contradictory supervision.

According to activity theory, student teachers were able to appropriate tools of thinking which were made available to them by social agents (supervisors), who acted as interpreters and guides. According to Vygotsky (1929), it is this type of a professional culture that has the crucial role of driving professional development forward. Vygotsky summed up this view in the following way:

> 'An organism [student teacher] internally prepared, absolutely requires the determining influence of the environment in order to enable it to accomplish that [professional] development' (Vygotsky, 1929:423).

Supervisors in this case provided the necessary environment for professional development. The positive supervision also matched with Zahorik's (1988) effective supervisory roles. Zahorik (1988) noted that effective roles of supervisors included:

(a) **Behaviour prescriptors**, meaning that supervisors support student teachers to acquire basic instructional skills;

(b) **Idea interpreter**, meaning that supervisors present beliefs about what classrooms and schools ought to be like and suggest ways to bring about change; and

(c) **Person supporter,** meaning that supervisors promote student teachers' own decision making and encourage them to think for themselves.

The activity system of teacher educators (supervisors) and student teachers could be viewed as well-aligned towards achieving the object of teaching practice unlike in the two other cases of supervision. This seems to point to the direction of legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1988) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) on the activity of teaching practice as supervisors supported student teachers.

9.7 Innovations to teaching practice

The perspectives from activity theory were also useful for identifying changes and innovations to teaching practice within its various activity settings. The indirect outcomes of student teachers' experiences of teaching practice can be seen through innovation and changes to an activity system. Activity theory is said to be 'a virtual disturbance-and-innovation-producing machine' (Russel, 2002: 71). When there are contradictions or clashes, activity theory seems to be an effective tool for understanding and, if possible, solving the disturbances. It prompts individuals to ask better questions for redesigning activity system's environments. The motives for innovations and changes are ways which make an activity

more meaningful to subjects. Changes to activity settings are regarded as innovations which may eventually change the broader outlook of the activity system. Activity theory encourages engaged critical inquiry whereby an investigation should afford an analysis that would lead to the development of material and symbolic-conceptual tools necessary to enact positive interventions (Bakhurst, 1991).

Student teachers proposed intervention to teaching practice based on their experiences. In addition, supervisors also offered some ideas of intervention to teaching practice.

9.7.1 Placements of student teachers and timing of teaching practice

In the first place, student teachers perceived that placement of student teachers during teaching practice as needing change. The need for change appeared to have been motivated by the need for extensive experiences for more productive teaching practice. A student teacher commented:

> Student teachers should be sent to do teaching practice at schools that have enough teaching materials so that teaching practice is conducted without many problems of looking for resources. Student teachers should only worry about teaching their subjects not about not having teaching and learning materials (student teacher).

The need for placing student teachers at certain schools related to the views that some school settings inhibited the appropriate conduct of teaching practice. This has been discussed at length in earlier sections of **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**. I noted that student teachers felt that Gawani secondary school setting left a lot to be desired. The physical infrastructure was presented to be in bad state for student teachers to have productive experiences. Lack of resources at the school caused varying tensions among student teachers. The change in student teachers' placement would supposedly reduce tensions caused by 'improper' placement settings.

As regards the timing of teaching practice, both supervisors and student teachers felt that there was need for change. They were of the view that teaching practice be conducted during a school term where there were no national examinations being undertaken. This seemed to have been influenced by the disturbances that appeared to surface during teaching practice when conducted at the same time as national examinations. The disturbances took the form of inadequate support for student teachers due to teachers in the school leaving for invigilation as well as the need for some classroom space for national examinations. This intervention was manifested in the comments from student teachers and supervisors:

> Teaching practice should be done in a term when there are no examinations in progress. The present arrangement is that Junior Certificate examinations coincide with teaching practice this disturbs seating plan as some classrooms have to be given up for examinations. Most

practicing teachers go for invigilation; therefore little support is given from remaining teachers. Hence student teachers may not have full support (supervisor).

If possible, the college should change the teaching practice calendar because it is mostly disturbed with the examinations of Junior Certificate Examinations and Malawi School Certificate Examinations (student teacher).

The minimal interactions between student teachers and other teachers in the school necessitated a change in the timing of teaching practice. It would appear that interactions between student teachers and other teachers were partly hindered by national examinations that were taking place at the time of teaching practice. Participants in the study observed that most teachers at the school went on invigilation duties and student teachers engaged in teaching and learning in place of teachers who had gone to invigilate national examinations. This resulted to minimal interactions between student teachers and other teachers at the school. This led to some conclusion that secondary schools were not ideal settings for teaching practice during national examinations.

The supervisors and some student teachers also felt that there was need to increase teaching practice period to a whole school term. Secondary school terms normally run for about 14 weeks. The supervisors and student teachers made the following remarks in suggesting this intervention/innovation:

The period should be extended to a full term as the current teaching practice sometimes disturbs school programmes where student teacher only teach for a short period and then leave the school. This creates problems of continuity (supervisor).

The period for teaching practice should be extended to a whole term for the students to have time to evaluate the pupils (student teacher).

Teaching practice was blamed for disrupting the attainment of the object of the school system (that of pupil learning). The shorter period of teaching practice was looked at within the context of the stability of pupil learning. The shorter period of teaching practice was viewed to be a source of disruptions of the school system. Student teachers assumed total responsibilities of some classes due to national examinations that were taking place and when they left the school at the end of teaching practice, there was some confusion on how teachers proceeded with such classes. The teachers had to formulate tests and mark them.

The fact that student teachers were only learning to teach posed the issues of the reliability of examining pupils based on what student teachers had been 'teaching'. This potentially exhibited contradiction within the student teacher's system which affected the pupil and school systems. The status of student teachers as learners suggested that they were not in any position to be left on their own to examine pupils' learning. The progress of pupils in the school system could also not be completely supported by student teachers alone.

At the same time, teaching practice was meant to be an all-embracing activity and student teachers thought they needed to experience the multifacetedness of it as much as possible. The student teachers needed to experience aspects of teaching and learning that occurred towards the end of the term such as testing and marking and conduct a self evaluation of their progress during teaching practice by based on pupil performance on the topics they had taught. Student teachers felt that they needed to finish the 'jobs' they had started so that other teachers in the school did not feel the inconvenience of taking over incomplete work. It would appear that a longer period of teaching practice was seen as useful for more productive experiences of teaching practice.

I also noted from another student teacher's perspective that increased period of teaching practice was essential in encouraging more supervision. A student teacher noted:

> *I think the teaching practice time to some extent has to be increased because for example, I myself was supervised three times. In Mathematics, two times, in Biology one time. So the mistakes that I made in Biology during that period of supervision, I cannot be sure to correct them, so it is either they intensify the supervision or increase the period (student teacher).*

Where the call for more supervision was informed by positive experiences, it meant that more would be learned when teaching practice was extended to a whole school term. Student teachers could also undergo intensive supervision during longer periods. The suggestions by student teachers and supervisors seemed to follow the line of making teaching practice more meaningful for student teachers. This would be viewed in line with an 'educative practicum' (see Zeichner, 1996).

9.7.2 Changing elements of supervision settings

The supervision element evoked a number of tensions among student teachers. In addition, supervisors thought of ways in which supervision could be made more effective for the benefit of student teachers. The student teachers perceived that supervision be enacted to stimulate positive professional development. Two student teachers remarked:

> *I expect supervisors to advise me on techniques of classroom management; how to interact with the staff members; how to teach subject matter tactfully. They should help me with skills of preparation of lesson plans, schemes of work, and records of work. They should give advice in my weak areas, suggest ways of improving in certain areas and act as a professional counselor (student teacher).*
>
> *I expect supervisors to help in finding out how happy we are with the conditions of teaching practice and later report this to college management because if we are to do it ourselves, they may not believe us. They should advise me on where to improve my teaching and also motivates me with their positive remarks and encouragement. They should advise me on how best I can teach and correct any mistakes in teaching (student teacher).*

The two student teachers appeared to think that supervisors should adapt their role to a more supportive one. In this way, they could offer technical, methodological, moral support and

guidance. These student teachers felt that the positive role would reduce tension that student teachers faced in the school as well as during the whole teaching practice period. As pointed out earlier, positive experiences of supervision harness professional development among student teachers (see **Section 9.6**).

The student teachers at Gawani secondary school were also concerned about being supervised by lecturers who were non-subject specialists. This mismatch in supervision was a source of contradictory as well as ill-informed remarks. With this in mind, some supervisors perceived that supervision would benefit student teachers if only appropriately qualified subject specialists interacted with them during supervision. A supervisor advanced his viewpoint by saying:

> *Student teachers should be supervised the most by a subject specialist who can give proper support and feedback (supervisor).*

The urge for improved supervision by only subject specialists could be seen as an admission that different subjects followed different approaches for preparing and delivering lessons. While school subjects belonged to the same curricular system, teaching strategies were not necessarily reciprocal. The supervisor felt that student teachers were therefore likely to benefit from specialist supervisors. The specialist supervisors would offer relevant guidance and support as social agents of the practices of the various subjects.

I also found that some supervisors proposed collaborative supervision as a guide to the conduct of teaching practice. In advocating for collaborative supervision, a supervisor said:

> *Student teachers should be co-supervised with head teachers, heads of departments and teachers in the schools (supervisor).*

The urge for collaborative supervision could be seen as an admission that school and college collaborative partnership was necessary for enhancing the effects of college teacher education on the school practice. The urge for collaboration also suggested linking the college and school activity systems so that they both work together to promote teaching practice. In such an arrangement, members of the teaching community would take on roles of ensuring that student teachers were given appropriate support within favourable environments. The fact that student teachers spent some time with school teachers during teaching practice meant that school teachers had to become highly involved in supervision to offer relevant guidance to student teachers to reduce tensions which they faced.

However, it has been noted that school teachers tend to practice traditional models of teaching (see **Section 9.4**). As such, the feasibility of effective collaborative supervision would require additional efforts to train school teachers so that they become aware of their

roles and expectations. Teachers would need to learn more about the theoretical side of teacher education and be better able to match supervisory styles to the developmental stages of student teachers. It has been suggested that one of the ways of making teaching practice more meaningful for student teachers is to incorporate teacher education into the pedagogic goals of the school if it is to support student teachers as learner's (Edwards, 2002). With regard to activity theory, this might be seen as a way of bridging the gap and differences between the school system and the college system.

9.7.3 Changing assessment procedures of teaching practice

One of the contentious elements of teaching practice can be said to be assessment that follows from supervision. Most of the efforts of student teachers and supervisors seem to revolve around assessment. This was specifically the case with the third year cohort of student teachers in the previous chapter. While third year student teachers (see **Chapter Eight**) suggested innovations to supervision, second year student teachers also promulgated a new approach to assessment during teaching practice.

Some student teachers at Gawani secondary school considered the current mode of assessment as parochial as it focused only on observations of classroom and did not look at teaching practice holistically. The prospect of a redefined assessment was conveyed in the following remarks by two student teachers:

> *Currently, the emphasis of assessment is mostly on what is happening in the classroom and not on what you have gained as a whole. I think it is difficult to involve all other areas in the school for teaching practice because that can not be measured on the observation form. Maybe all other areas should be looked into where student teachers should just write reports at the end of teaching practice apart from being supervised only. Supervision should continue as a way of helping student teachers. Lecturers should look at the teaching practice report to give a final grade. This way all aspects of teaching practice will be covered (student teacher).*

> *Student teachers should be empowered to have trips and activities such as science trips, of course that is always there but I am talking in terms of sometimes it happens that supervisors have come to supervise you but that time you want to teach differently because some times with the involvement of supervisors and their emphases, you just concentrate on what they want and not on what you want the pupils to learn. This could be possible if there was a change in the manner of assessment. They should assess all aspects of the activities in the school and not classroom work only. They can ask us to use teaching practice to write a project paper that can be very comprehensive and assess that in addition to classroom observation. The project paper will outline all the successes we experience in school as well as the failures and the problems that we face and how we try to solve them. I think the project may be useful to lecturers to learn more about the schools (student teacher).*

The two student teachers wanted assessment to be reenacted in line with the multifacetedness of teaching practice. The student teachers perceived that teaching practice should be assessed through a holistic approach. They proposed that student teachers should produce a report at the end of teaching practice in addition to classroom oriented assessment which was currently in practice. According to the student teachers quoted above, reports and lesson

observations were proper ways of presenting the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice.

The proposal could be predicated on the assumptions that teaching practice comprised a number of distinct activity settings which should all be considered when assessing the performance of student teachers. Each of the multiple activity settings of teaching practice has its own specific motive, structural features, sets of relationships, and resources for learning to teach (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). All these needed to be looked at through the report from student teachers. The way assessment was done currently, (based only on a maximum of four sessions of observations) appeared to disregard the influences of other activity settings in the thinking of student teachers. Student teachers felt that the multifacetedness of teaching practice could best be assessed by considering all the critical actions within various contexts of teaching practice.

Within activity theory perspective, student teachers suggested that supervisors should view and analyse teaching practice from the viewpoint of the subjects and the school system. Based on Engeström and Miettinen (1999), supervisors should 'construct the activity setting of teaching practice as if looking at it from above' (p. 10). The professional activity in activity system mediates interaction between subjects (agents) and objects. By engaging in holistic assessment, critical issues that mediated the actions and thinking of student teachers on teaching practice during school placement could be taken into consideration.

9.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis and discussion of research findings from mainly second year student teachers who conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school. The analysis and discussion has demonstrated varied experiences of student teachers with perceivable implications on professional development and a need for changes to some aspects of teaching practice.

The findings showed that some student teachers had personally taken the decision to conduct teaching practice at Gawani secondary school. The decisions that student teachers made were partly based on the images which they held of the school. In addition, some student teachers were sent to the school even though they had demonstrated that they had not chosen the school as their first priority.

I found that student teachers identified some constraints in the school. The constraints implied that teaching practice and its inherent objective were affected in some way. The findings showed that the division of tasks did not necessarily acknowledge that student

teachers were learning to teach. This indicated the existence of multiple and competing objectives in the two activity systems which were not acknowledged by the school system. Student teachers were assigned tasks similar to those of established teachers and this implied that student teachers had to struggle to achieve the primary objective of teaching practice. At the same time, they had to struggle to achieve the primary objective of the school, which was pupil learning. I also found that student teachers were affected by the structures of classes in which they had to learn to teach. Student teachers perceived the class sizes as too large for them. In these contexts, teaching practice was seen as not helpful in maximizing the goals which the college had set for student teachers to achieve. The large classes were potential sources of tensions for the student teachers.

The findings showed inconsistencies between teacher education and the expected practice of student teachers in a school system. The student teachers suggested that there was a mismatch between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge during college education. Student teachers' suggestion that methodology lecturers relied heavily on knowledge transmission (teacher-centred) to prepare them for learner-centred pedagogy was seen as a source of contradiction as it was seen to ill-prepare them for the appropriate pedagogy during school actions. However, lecturers were only teaching adults who happened to be student teachers. They had to use teaching approaches which fitted with adult learning, thus adopting a teacher-centred approach. This did not go down well with student teachers.

I also found that the application of learner-centred pedagogy in the school was impeded by what appeared to be the socio-cultural-historical factors in the school system. For instance, the orientation in the secondary school was perceived to be passing national examinations and this meant that teachers relied on pedagogical practices which promoted passing examinations. In addition, pupils were said to resist the pedagogical orientation which student teachers were expected to use during teaching practice. This rendered some aspects of teacher education unusable or irrelevant in actual secondary school classrooms.

The findings have shown that both engaged and disengaged relationships were critical during interactions between student teachers and other teachers at the school. However, student teachers seemed to benefit from engaged relationships. This relationship suggested that student teachers could experience 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Wenger, 1988) alongside more expert practitioners, whom they interacted with. On the other hand, disengaged relationships which existed between student teachers and other teachers were perceived as creating gaps for professional socialization. The relationships between pupils

and student teachers also varied during social and professional interactions. The pupils in the school were viewed to be disrespectful of student teachers' during professional interactions while student teachers tended to be closer to pupils than the other teachers in the school in social settings.

The activity setting of supervision yielded varied findings. I found that student teachers perceived supervision at four systemic levels with varying effects. I found that student teachers regarded 'overly critical supervision settings' as more condemnatory of student teachers' actions during teaching practice. This setting of supervision negatively affected professional development of student teachers. Secondly, student teacher regarded supervision settings that were predicated on 'contradictory expectations of supervision' as also not effective. This implied that student teachers were not helped much to learn to teach in this setting of supervision. The perceivably improper attitude of some supervisors was also contributed towards poor relationships between student teachers and supervisors. Lastly, student teachers regarded settings which promoted 'positive supervision experiences. The student teachers, however, suggested that positive experiences of supervision afforded them confidence and belief in their abilities to teach as they developed.

Furthermore, the findings in the chapter have shown a desire for innovation to teaching practice. The call for innovations to teaching practice was not an indictment of teaching practice or the school systems where student teachers conducted teaching practice. I have shown that student teachers and supervisors suggested redesigning elements within teaching practice. Student teachers felt that teaching practice could become more relevant if they were placed at secondary schools which promote learning to teach. Supervisors proposed a change to the period of teaching practice. There was a feeling among supervisors that longer teaching practice period could enhance learning to teach. Supervisors also proposed conducting teaching practice when no national examinations were scheduled. This proposal was motivated by supervisors' thinking that student teachers would benefit more from teachers who, otherwise, go for invigilation.

The findings in the chapter also pointed to innovation and changes to supervision. I found that student teachers perceived facilitative supervision settings as more productive for them to attain the object of teaching practice. Coupled with that, supervisors suggested that subject specialists take central role in supervision. This was seen as an essential way of facilitating learning to teach among student teachers during school placements. Supervisors also called for collaborative supervision where teachers in the school would be highly involved in the

activity of teaching practice. Since classroom observation, and in broad terms, teaching practice was also used for assessment; student teachers felt that assessment would be more meaningful if it embraced the multifacetedness of student teachers' experiences in schools. Student teachers proposed a holistic assessment approach based on both project reports and classroom observations.

In the next chapter, I address the cross-case findings presented in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** with the view of generating common findings from second year and third year cohorts of student teachers placed at two different schools. In addition, the next chapter offers the final discussion and conclusions of the entire research study.

CHAPTER TEN: CROSS-CASE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

10.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of student teachers during teaching practice using perspectives from an activity theory framework. In this chapter I provide a discussion of cross-case findings from the second and third year cohorts of student teachers placed at two secondary schools for teaching practice. The findings that I discuss were analyzed and interpreted in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**. Patton (2002) noted that using a cross-case design allows understanding an activity within certain circumstances. I also provide a general discussion of teacher education development and some of the key recommendations to teaching practice at Masambiro College. Further, I discuss some of the major limitations in the current study. Towards the end of the chapter, I discuss some of the implications of using activity theory in the study and argue the originality of this piece of research before making conclusions of the study.

10.1 Cross-case findings in the study

In this section I draw on the findings in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** on the experiences of student teachers in the study. The use of an activity theory framework allowed me to relate the experiences of two cohorts of student teachers in two schools to each other and draw out major issues that student teachers experienced across schools (Engeström, 1999). The overall experiences of student teachers during teaching practice at both schools can be better understood through cross-case discussion. The findings that I look at in the section related to the themes along:

(a) The student teachers' views of school settings;

(b) The division of tasks among student teachers;

(c) The pedagogical actions of student teachers;

(d) The apparent lack of partnership between college and secondary schools;

(e) The school teachers and student teachers relationships;

(f) The student teachers and pupils relationships

(g) The supervision settings of teaching practice;

(h) The innovations to teaching practice.

It can be seen that I do not look at the findings presented in **Chapter Seven** in this section. The reason for this is the findings in **Chapter Seven** represented overall findings from student teachers at various schools and I summarize the findings presented in **Chapter Seven** in the concluding remarks of the thesis (see **Section 10.6**).

10.1.1 The student teacher's views of school settings

With regards to the views of student teachers at both secondary schools about the secondary school setting of teaching practice, I found that student teachers had varied views and experiences during placement at the secondary schools (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**). Student teachers who went to Limbani secondary school mostly had favourable images of the secondary school that they went to. The images were critical in the formation of a desire to ask the teaching practice coordinator to place them at the school. In regard to placement at Gawani secondary school, some student teachers had favourable views of the school and wanted to go there.

However, not all student teachers who went to Gawani secondary school had initially wanted to go to the school. This suggests that even though some student teachers might have held opposing views about going to particular schools, they could still be placed at schools which they did not want. This offers an additional explanation of the way student teachers were placed at different schools for teaching practice. There appeared to be no uniform model that the college used to place student teachers at different schools.

In terms of their experiences, student teachers at both schools pointed to a shortage of tools in some subject contents as source of pedagogical concerns in their classroom actions. Tools were necessary for the objective of teaching practice. Even though student teachers had (for instance) chosen Limbani secondary school, it would appear the school experienced short supply of pedagogical resources for teaching and learning. On the other hand, the conditions at Gawani Secondary School seemed to be less likely to promote teaching practice than the conditions at Limbani secondary school. It would appear that student teachers in the second year who went to Gawani secondary school had more problems associated with resource constraints compared to student teachers at Limbani secondary school. Second year student teachers had more to learn from teaching practice as this was the first period of teaching practice for them compared to third year student teachers who were on teaching practice for the second time.

10.1.2 The division of tasks among student teachers

The division of tasks among members in an activity system ensures that people carry out actions and operations that contribute to the overall objective of an activity system. In the case of student teachers, the tasks that they were allocated in the secondary school were meant to promote learning to teach. However, the reality in the schools seemed to suggest otherwise. Student teachers at the two secondary schools viewed the intensity of tasks that they were assigned as both manageable in some settings and unmanageable in other settings. The variation was attributed to factors such as class sizes, limited resources, pedagogical orientations, and other factors. For instance, large classes were believed to create inconsistencies/contradictions in the way learner-centred pedagogy could be used by student teachers. The tasks associated with learner-centred pedagogy were viewed to be implicated by class size and lack of necessary resources. The inconsistencies associated with division of tasks of student teachers suggested that the objective of teaching practice that student teachers were expected to achieve in secondary schools were affected.

The findings that student teachers at both schools were assigned tasks that were not very different from other teachers implied that student teachers were viewed in the same way as school teachers even though student teachers were still undergoing their teacher education and therefore had a different rationale for being at the school. Student teachers had to strive to achieve the objective of teaching practice while at the same time ensuring that they were carrying out the objective that other school teachers were engaged in-that of pupil teaching and learning. Interestingly, even though the two cohorts of student teachers in the study were at different levels of their studies, this was not reflected in the amount of tasks they were assigned during teaching practice. The school system did not appear to consider the student teachers to be at different levels in terms of their knowledge and skills of teaching.

10.1.3 The pedagogical activities of student teachers

The findings from student teachers showed some inconsistencies between some aspects of teaching practices in the college and the expected pedagogical practice of student teachers in the school systems. Some student teachers suggested a mismatch of theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge during their college education. They suggested that methodology lecturers relied heavily on knowledge transmission approach (teacher-centred) to prepare them for learner-centred pedagogy. Some student teachers viewed this as a source of contradiction. Even though the use of a teacher-centred approach was viewed as a mismatch by student teachers, it could be argued that college lecturers were teaching student teachers who were adults and learner-centred pedagogy was viewed as a favourable approach for

teaching pupils in school. The concern this created was that of how student teachers were going to appropriate and use learner-centred pedagogy from college education that was mostly driven by teacher-centred approaches. It would appear that student teachers failed to see the difference in the college system where lecturers were teaching them to become teachers and the school system where student teachers would be teaching young people.

The student teachers at both secondary schools had a number of pedagogical actions to carry out in the course of learning to teach during teaching practice. The pedagogical actions required the use of conceptual and pedagogical tools which student teachers had 'appropriated' during college courses. The pedagogical actions of student teachers were also dependent on classroom settings in which they were expected to conduct lessons. Individual values were found to be critical in appropriation (or lack of appropriation) of learner-centred pedagogy. A student teacher at one school said that she would use learner-centred pedagogy despite the impediments that affected the use of this instructional approach at the secondary school where she was placed. However, it remains to be seen how far she was going to use the approach in settings that did not have necessary conditions for its use. In addition, a number of student teachers at both schools noted that some pedagogical orientations such as learner-centred pedagogy were not used by other school teachers. This meant that student teachers would have difficulties to use a teaching approach which was not central to the current school system.

The application of learner-centred pedagogy in the schools was also impeded by what appeared to be the socio-cultural-historical factors in the school system. For instance, the emphasis in the secondary school curriculum was perceived to be passing national examinations and this meant that teachers relied on pedagogical practices that had been developed over time which promoted passing examinations. In addition, pupils were said to resist the learner-centred pedagogical orientation that student teachers were expected to use during teaching practice because they were used to the teacher-centred approach which was used by other school teachers. This meant that there were some differences between school and college systems. This suggested that not all that student teachers learned in college was relevant for teaching and learning in secondary schools. The school system had an important role in defining student teachers' professional objectives. The school system also had a corrodible effect on some of the aspects which student teachers learned in college.

10.1.4 The lack of collaborative partnership between college and schools

The findings from student teachers in the study showed that the college and the schools where teaching practice was conducted lacked collaborative partnership. Collaborative partnership has been praised for promoting mutual respect among supervisors and school teachers in their respective roles of facilitating student teacher's learning. The result of the lack of collaborative partnership meant that the activity systems of the school and college were not deliberately linked to support teaching practice. The findings that schools and the college did not form collaborative partnerships possibly contributed to 'disengaged relations' that some student teachers experienced at the schools. In addition, there was a problem with legitimate peripheral participation of student teachers in school's operations that were meaningful sources of learning to teach from school teachers. The benefits of collaborative efforts are manifold and enrich each triad member (namely, student teacher, mentors/cooperating teacher and college supervisor) of teaching practice.

In collaborative partnerships, student teachers have opportunities to incorporate fully both the theoretical and the practical knowledge into their teaching. Additionally, the 'cooperating teacher' or mentor (who directly works with the college supervisor) and the college supervisor create better working relationships based on mutual respect and understanding for each others' expertise, perspectives, and roles. This also helps resolve some of the tensions between the two 'competing' systems of the school and the college. The 'cooperating teacher' or mentor and college supervisor act as bridging elements within the two systems. Both supervisors and 'cooperating teachers' or mentors work hand in hand to support student teachers in the school and reduce the degree of tensions which student teachers may face. Since 'cooperating teachers' or mentors are always available in the schools, student teachers may learn a lot from them about the complexities of teaching in actual classrooms more so than college supervisors who only visit student teachers on very few occasions.

10.1.5 The school teachers-student teachers' community relationships

The findings in relation to student teachers and school teachers' relationships were heavily implicated in the lack of school-college collaborative partnerships. The overall findings at the two schools revealed that systemically, school teachers and student teachers related differently. In some cases, there were 'engaged relationships' and at another level, there was 'disengaged relationship'. Student teachers benefited from 'engaged relationships' in the activity settings of learning to teach. This relationship suggested that student teachers experienced 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Wenger, 1988) alongside more expert practitioners with whom they interacted. On the other hand, 'disengaged relationships' were

sources of limited professional socialization, legitimate peripheral participation and experiential learning. Within 'disengaged relationships' student teachers may not have been seen as apprentices in the profession.

10.1.6 The student teachers-pupils' relationships

The other relational issue that was shown in the study was that of student teachers and pupils. The relationships between pupils and student teachers varied between professional and social relationships. The pupils were disrespectful of student teachers in some cases of professional interactions. Another aspect of the relationship between student teachers and pupils appeared to be caused by the inability of the student teachers to fit into the operations of the school system as evident in the problems which arose when a certain student teacher tried to give a test on the chalkboard. At one secondary school, some student teachers felt that they were closer to pupils in social relationships. Even though this was not a common relational dynamic, it was an important phenomenon as it suggested dispositional tendencies among student teachers to psychologically feel closer to pupils than the professionals whom they were supposed to learn from in the schools.

10.1.7 The supervision settings of teaching practice

In general, the supervisory problems identified in the study related to lack of substantive communication between supervisors and student teachers which complicated the supervisory process. There were normally limited interactions between student teachers and supervisors. Some college supervisors and student teachers did not seem to appropriately share expectations of the goals of teaching practice. Some student teachers and college supervisors misunderstood each other, lacked unity, and supervision did not promote a facilitative role of supervision (see also Wood, 1989).

The activity settings of supervision revealed varied findings in the two secondary schools in the study. At both secondary schools, I found that student teachers were affected by the role of supervisors and the inappropriately qualified supervisors. In these cases the setting of supervision affected professional and pedagogical development of student teachers. Student teachers did no feel that they were appropriately supported to learn to teach in these settings of supervision of teaching practice.

Since assessment was emphasized in supervision student teachers were affected by constant negative remarks from supervisors without any facilitating of learning to teach. Student teachers experienced tension to satisfy the assessment emphasis and to get better grades on teaching practice. This represented a clash within the two systems of student teachers and

college lecturers. This suggested that the objective of teaching practice were conceived differently. On one hand, teaching practice was seen as learning to teach and on the other had, it was seen as a way to demonstrate that student teachers could teach effectively.

The subjection of student teachers to inappropriately specialized subject methodology supervisors generated some resentment and concerns. However, I also found that at one of the schools, some student teachers felt that some college supervisors were supportive of student teachers in the supervision of teaching practice. Some student teachers felt that some supervisors who supervised them were providing support and encouragement on actions in classrooms. So it could be that supervisors differed from one another even though they belonged to the same college system. This is important because it helps confirm the view that people in activity systems may have different beliefs, goals and agenda and these influence how they carry out their actions during supervision.

10.1.8 The proposals for innovations to teaching practice

As I pointed out earlier, the call for innovation to teaching practice should not be viewed as an indictment of teaching practice or the school systems where student teachers conducted teaching practice. In the study, I found that both student teachers and some supervisors suggested some innovations regarding teaching practice. In relation to activity theory, Wertsch (1981) maintains that the motive that is involved in a particular activity specifies what is to be maximized in that setting over other things. It would appear that student teachers who were in the third year of their studies wanted to maximize the activity setting of supervision. Their aspirations were directed towards improved supervision during teaching practice. There were other proposed ways of overcoming barriers to effective supervision for student teachers in the literature. The findings in the study showed some similarity with what was in the literature. Some of the ways suggested in the literature for overcoming the barriers include:

(a) Training for college supervisors to reconceptualize their roles (Boydell, 1986). This related to the findings on the need to reconceptualise supervision so that supervisors were a source of support to student teachers;

(b) Training for cooperating teachers to analyze their own teaching and supervisory techniques (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). This related to the findings on the need to maintain cooperating teachers and offer them appropriate training for their role; and

(c) Selecting and matching the triad members in a systematic way (Wood, 1989). This related to the need for collaborative partnership between schools and the college so as to reduce the tensions which student teachers experience when they operate in isolation in the school system.

The second year student teachers also made proposals for change to the activity system of teaching practice. They proposed that assessment of teaching practice should go beyond what supervisors observed in classrooms. This related to the view that teaching practice was a multi-faceted activity and bringing all the aspects of teaching into assessment would ensure that most actions of student teachers in the school system in which student teachers were involved were acknowledged as essential for teaching.

In addition, I found that both student teachers and supervisors suggested that teaching practice could become more relevant if they were placed at secondary schools that were endowed with favourable features which would promote learning to teach. This implied that student teachers wanted to use teaching practice primarily for their own professional development. However, secondary schools where student teachers were placed were not part of the student teacher system.

Furthermore, supervisors proposed a change to the schedule of teaching practice. They proposed conducting teaching practice during school terms during which there were no national examinations taking place. The reason was that student teachers could benefit from 'legitimate peripheral participation' from school teachers, who, otherwise went for invigilation of national examinations. However, this suggestion implied that examinations may not have been viewed as a legitimate activity which student teachers were expected to learn from. This presented an element of contradiction on what was perceived as essential activities from which student teachers' could learn from.

10.2 Discussion of teacher education developments

This section offers a discussion of initial teacher education in Malawi based on the research findings. The discussion is also based on an international discourse and policy imperatives around initial teacher education as advanced in **Chapter Two** and **Chapter Three**.

Even though the interpretation of the findings in this study did not follow a gender dimension, I discussed secondary school education within a gender perspective in the review of literature (See **Chapter Two**). There are manifold benefits to be accrued where secondary teacher education promoted parity for male and female candidates. Commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women through equal access at all levels of education is

essential for national development and the achievement of MDGs and EFA. At the University of Malawi, the push for gender equality can be evident in a number of policy decisions that have been adopted such as scholarship programmes for female students to ensure they complete their studies. There are also other forms of affirmative actions being taken with the university's constituent colleges. It is surprising therefore to have noted that the policy initiatives which are currently working in the University of Malawi have not yet been adopted by Masambiro College. As I noted (see **Chapter Five**) selection into the initial teacher education programme at Masambiro College continues to be based on academic merit only. In addition, the college appears to perpetuate the gender disparity in their initial teacher education programme through structural design such as having more bed space for male student teachers in comparison to female student teachers (see **Section 5.3.1**). This means that secondary school teacher education will continue to be dominated by males.

The international discourse on teacher education suggests that student teachers should espouse a progressive classroom pedagogical orientation. This means adopting learner-centred education for classroom teaching and learning. The discourse on learner-centred education as a teaching and learning approach (see **Section 3.3.2)** has an effective impact on pupil learning in classrooms. This approach is also favourable for the achievement of EFA goals. However, the learner-centred pedagogy has certain requirements for it to be effectively used during teaching and learning in classrooms. The findings in the current study show that classrooms both at secondary and at college level in Malawi (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**) tend to have large numbers of students. This is against the principle of learner-centred education which calls for smaller class sizes. The large numbers of pupils in secondary school classrooms is largely a direct result of another international policy initiative of FPE in line with EFA (see **Chapter Two**). In other words, the policy imperative of FPE has an effect on the implementation of learner-centred education in Malawi. A Free Primary Education policy initiative has had positive results in terms of increasing enrolments at primary and secondary schools but appears to have made it difficult for teachers to use learner-centred education in classrooms. The policy has meant that more teachers should be trained proportionate to the numbers of pupils joining primary and secondary education if learner-centred education or some forms of it could be effected.

In addition, learner-centred education requires not only smaller class sizes but it also calls for essential teaching and learning resources. I pointed out (see **Chapter Two**) that teachers in Malawi face resource constraints in teaching and learning activities and also noted (see **Chapter Three**) that lack of text books and large class sizes are affecting the implementation

of the new curriculum in primary school in Malawi. Student teachers experience difficulties in implementing learner-centred pedagogy in their classrooms as a result of these factors. This also implies that the international policy imperatives couched within learner-centred education such as EFA are bound to be affected by large classroom settings and lack of teaching and learning resources. It would be appropriate to suggest that learner-centred education policy cannot be successfully implemented in the Malawi context. It may be necessary for teacher educators in Malawi to consider 'mixed pedagogies' (see **Chapter Three**) as feasible pedagogical alternatives. 'Mixed pedagogies' may work in a context marked by limited resources and large classrooms, among other conditions. However, this does not suggest that learner-centred education should be given up completely but it means that structural hindrances in schools need to be addressed first before student teachers can successfully implement learner-centred pedagogy.

The international discourse on initial teacher education mainly from the developed world has also advocated mentoring in initial teacher education programmes (**Chapter Three**). Collaborative partnership between schools and colleges can bring about effective mentoring. As noted in **Chapter Three**, partnership is now the orthodoxy of initial teacher education in countries such as United Kingdom. In addition, collaborative partnerships between schools and colleges of teacher education in Malawi have not been adopted to augment school-based teaching practice (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**). In initial teacher education programmes where school-college partnership is used, there is significant commitment to sustain the arrangement and to ensure that school teachers are able to undergo training to enhance their mentoring roles.

Masambiro College previously put in place 'cooperating teachers' who assumed the role of mentors even though the role was not clearly defined. I have pointed out (see **Chapter Three**) how the term 'cooperating teacher' evokes undesirable undertones. The findings in the current study showed that there have been some problems with regard to 'cooperating teachers'. There are financial difficulties for school teachers to undergo INSET in Malawi and this lack of training undermines the role that 'cooperating teachers' can play in mentoring student teachers (see **Chapter Two**). In response to lack of support for student teachers from 'cooperating teachers', a decision was made at Masambiro College to phase out 'cooperating teachers'. This suggests that the 'cooperating teacher' role need to be redefined in line with the needs of initial teacher education. This also means adapting the role to what is achievable in school conditions in Malawi.

The financial challenges facing teacher education and secondary school teaching in Malawi means that collaborative partnership should be adapted to the Malawi context. This might require a process whereby a teacher education institution teams up with few selected 'demonstration secondary schools' which can be used in the establishment of school-college partnership for initial teacher education. The concept of 'demonstration schools' already exists at primary school level in Malawi. 'Demonstration schools' come directly under the institutions of teacher training colleges (TTC) and the colleges tend to define the desired practices in such schools for the benefit of primary school student teachers' professional learning during teaching practice.

Teacher educators at Masambiro College should be aware of the specific implications of resources and other challenges in terms of secondary school teaching and how initial teacher education should be couched within the challenges. For example, the findings in the study point to lack of teaching and learning materials in secondary schools yet initial teacher education appears to expect student teachers to apply teaching and learning strategies which they learned in theory in college coursework without considering the availability of supporting tools. Teacher educators, especially those involved with supervising student teachers should be aware of this and take them in consideration during classroom observations. This could help make supervision more context-related and realistic for student teachers and teacher education colleges.

As noted in **Chapter Two**, internationally-driven policies which the Government has adopted such as EFA and FPE have had major impact on secondary school teaching and teacher education in the sense that pupil enrolments increased dramatically and pupil-teacher ratios are currently very high. In many cases, the placement of student teachers for teaching practice appears to provide secondary schools with 'unqualified teachers' to take up full responsibilities of teaching due to shortage of secondary school teachers. This suggests that the conceptualization of teaching practice at college level is not able to respond to the challenges posed by FPE. In this case, teaching practice tends to serve secondary schools by providing 'substitute teachers' other than serving student teachers' professional learning. This has a tendency of watering down the effects of college coursework on student teachers' professional development. Student teachers are placed in schools as learners but the reality in schools suggests otherwise. They take up classes as full time teachers and this relates to what Lortie (1975) said that novice teachers may assume full classroom responsibilities on the first day of their work. In the case of Malawi, such student teachers do not have mentors to support them in their initial teaching and learning experiences. As such, they may face a wide

range of challenges such as those discussed in **Chapter Three**. This may have an impact on the decisions to stay in teaching in the long-term. Of course, I discussed in **Chapter Three** that there are other factors which affect prospective teachers' decisions to stay in teaching apart from the work-related conditions.

It would also be argued that it appears that the training of student teachers during initial teacher education assumes that secondary school classrooms will be smaller. This is viewed in line with the pedagogical orientations of secondary school curriculum as well as the pedagogical philosophy of an initial teacher education programme, namely learner-centred education. However, the effects of FPE/EFA have meant that there are large numbers of pupils in both primary school and secondary school classrooms. This works against a successful implementation of a learner-centred education. If initial teacher education is based on the structural challenges in secondary school, an alternative pedagogical orientation may be required. This would reduce the shattering effects that teaching practice may have on student teachers when they realise that not all they learn in college can be applicable in secondary school settings in Malawi.

Another important aspect of initial teacher education is in relation to supervision of student teachers on teaching practice. It has been argued that supervision has far reaching consequences for student teachers during teaching practice especially in Malawi where the performance of student teachers on teaching practice contributes towards the overall performance on teacher education programme. A better overall performance on a teacher education programme has far reaching consequences in terms of career advancement. Many student teachers may hope to upgrade to a degree qualification after attaining a diploma on teacher education. It can be argued that supervision does not appear to be framed within the perspectives of secondary schools where student teachers conduct teaching practice, but rather; it is framed within the perspectives of Masambiro College. This seems to become a divisive and source of tension during post-observation conferences between student teachers and college supervisors. It would be helpful for supervisors to take into consideration the reality of secondary school conditions during supervision. The assessment process could benefit a great deal if it were informed by the practicalities of teaching and learning in resource-constrained secondary schools. There are other ways of ensuring that secondary school contexts inform the supervision of student teachers as discussed in the recommendations in the current study.

In conclusion, Malawi has to train more teachers to meet demands of teachers in secondary schools as a way of reducing pupil-teacher ratios to some degree acceptable levels. Until this demand is achieved, the impact of teaching practice as a component of teacher education may continue to be questioned. Teaching practice may continue to serve as a source of 'unqualified teachers' for secondary schools other than serving professional learning of student teachers. Student teachers may continue to teach large numbers of pupils in their classrooms. Student teachers may continue to access inappropriately trained mentors to support them in secondary schools. The investment in secondary school could ensure that teaching and learning materials for both pupils and teachers are available in line with the curriculum orientation of learner-centred education. In the same vein, a deliberate effort of bringing about school-college partnership as a means of enhancing the impact of teaching practice on student teachers could be a welcome development. This may support student teachers in their classroom, socio-professional and supervisory contexts of their training.

While the international discourse has played a central role in the formulation of theory and practice in initial teacher education, there are specific factors which have slowed down the developments in teacher education. The insight provided by the international discourse in initial teacher education should continue to be the source of direction to teacher education developments. However, there is need of exercising caution in the way Malawi adopts international policy developments in education. There appears to be a school of thought that some policies need to be adapted rather than adopted in entirety for initial teacher education in Malawi. Teacher education in Malawi could benefit from a piecemeal process of innovations and adoption of relevant policies.

10.3 Recommendations

The recommendations in the current study should be viewed in line with contextual challenges that student teachers and supervisors reported in the study. The recommendations are based on the discussion of teacher education development, the international literature and the research findings in the current study. In line with activity theory, these recommendations may also create different forms of tensions for a teaching practice triad of student teachers, school teachers and college supervisors. However, my ability to formulate the recommendations is an indication that I understand the complexities of initial teacher education especially with reference to teaching practice in Malawi. The recommendations that I make should be viewed within the precincts of student teachers' experiences particularly in relation to the 'innovations' that they perceived during teaching practice.

10.3.1. The 'cooperating teacher's' role

The first recommendation is in regard to the role of cooperating teachers. The role of 'cooperating teacher' should be brought back in the activity system of teaching practice with some modifications. This recommendation is based on the views that student teachers expected a great deal of support from school based community members. As noted in the findings chapters (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**), the key component for thinking about learning is the idea of a 'community of practice' emanating from psychological and anthropological research on how knowledge is used and shared (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Activity theory places knowledge production in the place of the activity settings. With the re-introduction of 'cooperating teachers', student teachers would be guided to practical pedagogical knowledge through legitimate peripheral participation in activities alongside more experienced practitioners in form of cooperating teachers. I think that this would also minimize most of the concerns and tensions that student teachers went through during teaching practice (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** for some of the concerns and tensions that student teachers experienced). The redesigned role of 'cooperating teacher' or mentor could enhance student teachers' professional learning in school-based settings.

10.3.2. Replacing learner-centred with 'mixed pedagogies'

The second recommendation that I propose is in regard to 'mixed pedagogies' approach for student teachers in place for learner-centred pedagogy (see **Chapter Three**). Even though learner-centred pedagogy is highly valued, student teachers should not be tied to using it all times when there are many visible factors which militate against its implementation. This recommendation has been necessitated by the contextual factors in secondary schools and initial teacher education programme in Malawi which affected the use of learner-centred pedagogy during teaching practice. The factors relate to lack of resources, large class sizes and systemic tensions between the pedagogical practices of school teachers and student teachers at these schools.

I noted in the findings that a number of student teachers in the study incorporated some elements of learner-centred education, such as group work and pupil mobility; and not others. In this way, student teachers remained in control of knowledge production, while allowing pupils limited flexibility in working arrangements. This can be explained using the notion of 'situationally constrained choice' (see Cuban, 1993: 261), whereby social, cultural and organisational influences function to maintain some elements of teacher-centred practices while also allowing other elements learner-centred practice to prevail.

10.3.3. Collaborative Partnerships

The third recommendation has to do with school-college collaborative partnership which seemed to be lacking in the findings. Within an activity theory framework, the need for partnership is justified on the grounds that teacher education comprises a number of distinct activity settings such as college course work, field experiences, teaching practice, supervision, among others and the greater the activity settings which are available, the greater the prospects for incompatible goals to coexist. Well-managed partnership would bring about consistency of purpose across activity settings of college and secondary school thereby enhancing the primacy of learning to teach during secondary school teaching practice.

Hoyle and John (1998) noted the need for more collaborative partnership that targets teacher education programmes and its link with secondary school and college components to form a functional whole. This ensures that school systems and college systems do not operate in isolation but that they are interdependent in function and purpose. This would bring about systemic coordination between supervisors and school teachers to support student teachers. It would be necessary for school teachers to be prepared to take up mentoring roles and schools to be more ready to involve student teachers in the wider school activities. Due to various challenges teacher education faces in the developing countries, a gradual process of establishing selected secondary schools as models for collaborative partnership may be more feasible than an immediate wholesale implementation of collaborative partnership with all secondary schools where student teachers are placed for teaching practice.

10.3.4. Supervision and assessment of teaching practice

The fourth recommendations are connected to the supervision and assessment during teaching practice. These recommendations have been prompted by the concerns of student teachers on the current practice within activity settings of supervision and assessment. It would appear that supervision and assessment need to be more relevant to the primacy of teaching practice as a source of learning to teach.

In light of the need to make teaching practice more meaningful to student teachers, facilitative supervision involving appropriately qualified college personnel could be adopted. In addition, a holistic assessment should be encouraged. In this sense, assessment could be based on the overall activities of student teachers in the school and not focusing only on the activity setting of classroom observation as that does not represent the entirety of the activity settings of teaching practice in the school. An activity theory analysis of consequences of

supervision and assessment in the study has demonstrated some complexities that could be resolved by instituting some reforms as suggested here. A holistic assessment could ensure that contextual realities in secondary schools become significant in decisions which supervisors make about the perceived performance of student teachers in schools.

The implementation of facilitative supervision and holistic assessment may call for the need to create opportunities for college lecturers to undergo some forms of training to equip them with knowledge and skills necessary for promoting the changes. This would inevitably require provision of funding by government for in-service training and education. In this case, the desire to reform supervision and assessment is dependent on other external factors such as funding.

10.3.5 Further research

The other dimension of recommendation in the study takes the form of a need for further research. It should be noted that an activity theory perspective is quite useful for research that aims to understand professional development (Grossman *et al.*, 1999). It would be imperative that professional development was investigated through longitudinal studies so that we can appreciate trajectories that student teachers go through before they became experienced teachers. Within the lens of activity theory, much could be offered in the different phases (or social learning contexts) which people go through before they became experienced teachers. I also think that we can learn more about what student teachers appropriate in school and also what they fail to appropriate in course of their transitional professional development.

I would also like to suggest that a similar study on student teachers' experiences during teaching practice could be conducted where school teachers, supervisors and student teachers could all be participants. Such a study would provide the voices of all the people that matter in the triad of teacher training in the school. The triad of student teacher, school teacher and supervisor form a critical community of practice of learning and where all members in the community were involved in a study, I could have a more comprehensive analysis and interpretation of findings. I would also like to propose the replication of this study (with some modifications, bearing in mind the study limitations) with student teachers at other teacher education colleges in Malawi especially the University of Malawi, to increase the understanding of teaching practice at different colleges in Malawi. It may also be necessary to conduct a gender related study of student teachers' experiences of secondary school teacher education.

10.4 The originality of the study

It is important that I address the issue of originality in this thesis not only because it is one of the criteria of assessing quality in a doctoral research, but also, because it ensures that the study made significant contribution to teacher education knowledge from a Malawian perspective. I had noted in an earlier chapter (see **Chapter One**) about the need for synthesizing research findings from various studies in order to have a general view about a subject of study. In a research sense, an original contribution to knowledge is said not to necessarily mean an enormous breakthrough which has the subject of study rocking to its foundation but rather, it demonstrates that a researcher has a good grasp of how research is normally done in their field (Phillip and Pugh, 2000). Phillip and Pugh (2000:63) noted that original research means:

> Making a synthesis that has not been made before; using already known materials but with new interpretation; bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue…adding to knowledge in a way that has not been done before (Phillip and Pugh, 2000:63).

This suggests that original research can be understood through different senses. Cryer (1996:146-8) suggests some of the different senses of originality in academic research. These senses include:

(a) Originality in tools;

(b) Originality in exploring the unknown;

(c) Originality in exploring the unanticipated;

(d) Originality in the use of data;

(e) Originality in outcomes;

(f) Originality in by-products.

In the case of my study, it means that I had to show that I had something to say which my peers would want to listen to and that I was aware of what was being discovered, argued about, written and published by the academic community in my field (Silverman, 2005). The study I conducted met some of the conditions of originality for which I think it makes significant contribution to knowledge.

I would like to reiterate that studies on secondary school teaching practice have been carried out in other parts of the world but not in Malawi (see **Chapter One**). Therefore, this study is an addition to knowledge that has not been done before in a Malawi context. Specifically, this addition to knowledge has been couched within activity theory. I pointed out in the theoretical framework section (see **Chapter Four**) that activity theory has become

favourable for investigating professional development in the workplace. The schools where student teachers conducted teaching practice were work places apart from being learning sites for both pupils and student teachers.

The activity theory dimension of research of teacher education may yield by-products that may suggest improvements to the practice and policy of teacher education. In the case of this study, the innovations that student teachers and supervisors suggested (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**) could trigger debate that might suggest changes to policy and practice of teaching practice. Furthermore, the findings in the study were helpful for synthesizing with other findings from other studies across the world adding a developing country perspective to issues around teacher education especially teaching practice that have hitherto not been explored. This is important because in qualitative research generalization of findings from studies in different settings and with different participants may not be an ideal way of universalizing research findings.

10.5 Limitations of the study

It is necessary that I outline some of the major limitations in the current study. It is clear that qualitative research as a social process should be viewed as a negotiated activity between the researcher, the researched and the methods involved in the study. When a piece of research has reached its end, it does not imply that there were no impediments in the process of arriving at the completion of the study. The limitations may assist the researcher to identify alternative approaches of investigating topics of interests. There were a number of limitations which I faced during the conduct of the current study. These limitations do not suggest that this study was a failure but rather that this study's success should be seen within the contexts of its limitations.

The process of data collection in the study faced some hurdles. Data collection using observations and semi-structured interviews is subjected to the perceptions of the researcher. To minimize researcher subjectivity, I asked some participants to check data for any inconsistencies (see **Chapter Six**). However, some participants were not able to check data due to their unavailability at the times I returned to the schools. Apart from that, I relied on the use of different data collection tools in the study. The use of different tools, namely, interviews, critical incident logs and observation, provided some form of triangulation.

I must point out that the use of non-participant observation during data collection in the study generated some concerns. It was difficult to remain a non-participant observer while at the same time sit in class with pupils and the student teachers all aware of my presence. I had to

sit in the classrooms while student teachers and pupils carried out lesson activities. They noticed my actions and at some point I interrupted their lessons by my movements, either to take a photo or move from one side of the classroom to the other. I suspected that my presence in the classrooms might have affected the behaviour of both student teachers and pupils in the classrooms. My presence might have led either the student teachers or the pupils (or both) to behave in what they construed as 'socially appropriate' ways thereby limiting the naturalness of the phenomenon of interest in the study. This should be viewed as a limitation on the part of the methodological approach to observation of a natural activity in classroom. The effects of this on the findings were limited because I used non-participant observation together with pre-observation and post-observation interview questions. These were meant to cross-check the trustworthiness of the data which I gathered.

The empirical study reported in this thesis was conducted with limited numbers of student teachers. However, this was in line with a qualitative inquiry I had designed to carry out. The sample of student teachers from which participants were selected in the study was limited to student teachers who conducted teaching practice in central Malawi. In addition, student teachers who participated in the study were not selected based on academic merit. Readers of this study must therefore make careful decisions regarding the transferability of findings to other settings and to other participants. Nevertheless, the findings on experiences of student teachers presented in the study may be used to illuminate teaching practice and professional learning and development in other contexts. Beside the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice, this study attempted to contribute to the ongoing discussion of developing good teaching practice placements for productive professional development in workplace settings. The improved understanding of teaching practice and professional development might generate additional insight on teacher education policies and practices for Malawi.

The assumptions that one may bring to any research situation may impede the ability to make progress in journeys of gaining knowledge. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that as a researcher, I must be aware of any recognized and unrecognized assumptions so that they do not interfere with my ability to interpret a situation or an experience systematically and analytically. Patton (2002), while discussing assumptions of researchers in qualitative research, provided some advice that researchers must heed, cautioning that in order for the researcher not to become part of the problem I must not assume that I 'have all of the questions, much less all of the answers right'(p. 337).

I would like to state that my seven years of exposure to teacher education, firstly as a student teacher during my teacher education programme; secondly, my one year secondary school teaching, and some three years as a teacher educator, inevitably exposed me to some assumptions about teaching practice. These experiences in the education system and classroom inevitably are sources of researcher subjectivity. To limit their influence on the way I conducted this study, the data collection process involved employing rigorous methods and standards for compiling meticulous notes that record events or ideas as data. The participants in this study were given a chance to cross-check the data to ensure that bias, unreliability, irrationality did not creep in. The participant check was particularly done to make sure that the data spoke for the participants in the way they had wanted and not the way I had wanted. I only had to interpret accounts, events, and views as presented by the participants without any deliberate manipulation. The data analysis also followed a rigorous process, so was the interpretation of findings.

Another issue in relation to the limitations in the study had to do with the absence of a certain group of potential participants, namely, cooperating teachers. At the time that I was going for data collection, I was not aware that cooperating teachers would not be used during teaching practice. One of the data instruments in the study was designed to be used by cooperating teachers. With the phasing out of the cooperating teachers, I was not able to involve secondary school teachers in the study. This suggests that one of the potential participants I had thought were useful in this study were absent. I had hoped that cooperating teachers would provide their perspectives on student teachers and how cooperating teachers related with student teachers during teaching practice but the perspectives of cooperating teachers were not addressed. I also suspected that the study would have benefited from the voices of school teachers, heads of departments and school head teachers regarding the experiences of student teachers on teaching practice but I had not involved them in the study. The absence of the 'school voices' should be viewed as some form of limitation in the study. However, the findings in the study successfully represented the voices of the core *subjects* of teaching practice, namely, the student teachers.

Furthermore, although it is assumed that all gathered data reflected student teachers' true teaching practice experiences and beliefs; it is possible that student teachers could have been giving me, the researcher, who was also a familiar teacher educator, "socially correct answers". Therefore, this consideration must be taken into account when examining the results of the present study. I should point out that I relied on the best practices of conducting

social research to ensure that the student teachers did not feel pressured in any way to provide 'appropriate data'.

10.6 Implications of using activity theory in the study

This research undertaking was couched within an activity theory framework. The implications of adopting activity theory are manifold. Importantly, the study has focussed on several elements of the activity system of teaching practice. Activity theory highlights the importance of context where teaching practice and learning to teach takes place (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). This helped to portray the conceptual challenges on teacher education that matter most in learning to teach (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). This was seen as a shift from research on teacher education that focus on individual student teachers (Bullough, 1989) that only offer individualistic explanations for teaching practice and learning to teach. Individualistic research has been criticised for offering little hope of systemic change because that type of research imply that changing teacher education programme means changing one pre-service teacher at a time (Grossman *et al.*, 1999). This is in contrast to changing settings which may be much more possible than changing individuals.

The other advantage of using activity theory in the study was that I was able to focus on settings for professional development which reveals the kinds of social structures that matter most in learning to teach that in turn result in a particular kinds of professional development. An activity theory perspective allows for the analysis of the consequences of different approaches to professional development including university programmes, school based activities and other structures. Exploring consequences of different activity settings can be a fruitful avenue for instituting educational reform (Grossman *et al.*, 1999). This has been aptly done in the study where I have explored various aspects of the settings of teaching practice with varying consequences (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**). For instance, I have noted that some of the social structures in the school did not permit student teachers to learn from teachers who were in the school (for example, see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine** on college-school community relationships). By the same token, I was able to locate tensions and contradictions that student teachers faced during teaching practice within specific setting of teaching practice.

Some tensions in the study were due to inability to fit student teachers into school's sociological settings (Zeichner, 1983), professional settings, such as classroom routines, discipline, management issues (Veenman, 1984) and supervisory settings (Lyle, 1996). It appeared that some of the causes of tensions were difficult to eliminate because they were a

reflection of the beliefs and deep rooted social practices among members of the educational systems. In addition, the tensions were caused by the apparent lack of necessary tools for teaching and learning in schools (see **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**). This seemed to be a reflection of the problem that the government needed to address for teaching and learning in general, not only for teaching practice (see **Section 2.3.3** and **Section 2.3.5**).

The other implication of using activity theory was that it provided a rich theoretical basis for the importance of field experiences. Some research on teacher education has polarised college and school settings and bemoaned college's lack of influence (Grossman *et al.*, 1999). From an activity theory perspective, the design of field experiences is critical to the enterprise of learning to teach. Activity theory allowed me to look at the ways in which student teachers learn from their experiences during college course training and see how college course training contributed to the frames of actions and beliefs of student teachers in the school system. I was able to look at the relationship between college, school and student teacher systems in the study. The three activity systems were connected even though the relationships were not utilised for productive teaching practice (for example the school and the college systems did not appear to have agreed on mutual roles and aims of teaching practice). The school system seemed to expect student teachers to teach in the authentic classroom environment and the college system hoped that the classroom environment would provide student teachers with the capacity to learn to teach. In addition, some supervisors in the college system did not seem to regard their role to be that of promoting learning to teach as opposed to assessing student teachers. At the same time, most student teachers did not receive support and guidance in the schools. It was desirable, based on the study findings, for college lecturers and school teachers to offer appropriate support to foster professional growth of student teachers.

Furthermore, activity theory provided me with a framework for viewing social contexts in which student teachers participate and through which they appropriate [or not appropriate] pedagogical and conceptual knowledge and tools about teaching. Within the framework of activity theory, teacher education comprised distinct activity settings, including the college course work; field experiences, including student teaching; supervision; and concentric settings of school (Grossman *et al.,* 1999). Each of these activity settings has motives, structural features, sets of relationships, and resources that were useful for professional and pedagogical development. In addition, I was able to understand how activity settings may encompass conflicting goals that could be sources of contradictions as well as sources of

tensions (for example, see the activity settings of supervision in **Chapter Eight** and **Chapter Nine**).

10.7 Concluding remarks

This research study was an attempt at understanding teaching practice as a component of teacher education in Malawi. I considered experiences of student teachers during secondary school teaching practice based on the theoretical framework of activity theory. This study was necessitated by a general lack of studies or literature on secondary school teacher education in Malawi as well as on the value of teaching practice to teacher preparation from other parts of the world. The study was also necessitated by the academic debates on the need for an 'educative practicum' for student teachers (Zeichner, 1996).

I conducted empirical data collection using qualitative methodology with student teachers and some of the lecturers at Masambiro College. The tools that I used for collecting data were semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, critical incident logs, and non-participant lesson observations. I also relied on reading selected secondary documents to gain some information on the topic of study. I carried out data collection in secondary schools as well as at Masambiro College, where the student teachers who were involved in the study were undergoing their teacher education programme. The participants in the study were principally two cohorts of student teachers placed at two secondary schools in central Malawi.

There were 4 third year student teachers who participated in the study. These were all female and conducted teaching practice at Limbani secondary school. There were also 4 second year student teachers who were involved in the study. There were three male student teachers and one female student teacher in the second year cohort. The second year student teachers conducted teaching practice at Gawani secondary school. I also interviewed some college lecturers who acted as supervisors during teaching practice. The coordinator of teaching practice was also interviewed as part of data collection. I used categorical analysis as an analytical tool of the data which was gathered in the research study. I aimed at contributing new knowledge towards the existing knowledge on teacher education specifically teaching practice from a Malawi context. The results in the study provided varied and interesting findings on the experiences of student teachers. The research findings in the study should be viewed within the limitation which I discussed in **Section 10.5**.

In relation to the research questions in the study, I found that student teachers joined teaching practice for both utilitarian and altruistic motives. Utilitarian thinking among some student

teachers was viewed at several levels such as 'joining teaching due to failure to pursue desired careers'; 'joining teaching as a stepping stone'; and 'joining teaching as a means to upgrade'. On the other hand, the altruistic thinking related to 'joining teaching as a vocation'; and 'joining teaching as a way to serve society'. In addition, I found that student teachers harboured both negative and positive perceptions of teaching in general. These perceptions were viewed as significant in the way student teachers would relate to the teaching profession.

The findings also revealed that student teachers had prior views about the secondary school where they wanted to conduct teaching practice. I found that not all student teachers went to their favourable secondary schools to carry out teaching practice. I found that the division of tasks among student teachers did not follow a particular way related to the promotion of learning to teach. The classroom settings in which student teachers had to carry out lesson activities provided affordances and hindrances to learning to teach. Pedagogical activities of student teachers were also implicated in the study. In particular, I found that student teachers had mixed experiences about the appropriation and use of learner-centred pedagogy at both schools.

I found that the college and schools lacked any form of collaborative partnership for the promotion of teaching practice. In addition, the college phased out 'cooperating teachers'. In most cases, student teachers did not get a lot of support in the school settings. The activity settings of supervision also showed that student teachers and some college supervisors clashed in some way in their relationships. This was viewed as sources of contradictions in the activity system. On the other hand, some student teachers praised supervision settings in which supervisors were supportive and facilitated learning to teach. The final aspects of the findings in the study were to do with proposals for innovations to the activity of teaching practice. Student teachers and supervisors proposed a number of innovations to improve teaching practice.

In summary, in this thesis I have managed to explore some of the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in Malawi. I have managed to use qualitative methodology and perspectives from an activity theory perspective to understand teaching practice. The findings contribute to knowledge in the field of teacher education developments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Letter of research introduction

Peter Mtika

University of Malawi

Bunda College

4th August 2005

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Private Bag 328

Lilongwe

Attention: Director of Educational Planning

Dear Sir,

Permission to conduct PhD research in education

I write to seek permission to conduct academic research with student teachers. I would like to conduct empirical study during the time student teachers undergo teaching practice from August 2005 to March 2006.

I am a lecturer in teacher education with the University of Malawi. I am currently pursuing doctoral studies in teacher education at the University of Nottingham, under the supervision of Dr Peter Gates.

The title of my study is *'towards an understanding teaching practice as a component of teacher education in Malawi: an activity theory perspective'*.

I would like to assure you that my study adheres to research ethics, in line with the British Educational Research Association. I have attached the following supporting documents to furnish you with my study:
- Ethical guidelines
- Brief description of my study
- Participant consent form

I will be very grateful for your support.

Appendix B. Letter of introduction to supervisors

Peter Mtika

University of Malawi

Bunda College

4th August 2005

Introduction

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Nottingham. This letter is to inform you of the purpose of my study and to request your participation.

The study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. Learning to be a teacher is a complex and very personal matter that involves transformation from student teacher to teacher. The pathway to being a teacher is scattered with what appears to be competing tensions in various realities. This study explores experiences of student teachers during teaching practice.

Sampling and ethics

You have been purposively selected to participate in this study because of your role in the preparation of secondary school teachers who are key participants in the study.

I would like to assure you that this study adheres to research ethics and your confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed.

Your cooperation

I will be meeting you in the near future after you have had the chance to consider my request so that we can conduct interviews based on the interview schedule. Thank you for considering being involved in this study.

Appendix C. Student teacher consent form

Introduction

I am seeking your consent to be involved in a study related to student teachers that I am carrying out.

Description

The study is titled *'towards an understanding of teaching practice as a component of teacher education in Malawi: an activity theory perspective'*. It will involve interviews, keeping critical incident logs and non-participant observation with you.

Risks and Benefits

Occasionally, people do not like to be participants in research studies. This is the only risk associated with this study. The benefits, which may reasonably be expected to result from this study, are that you may be helping to improve our understanding of teacher education especially the field practical component of teacher education.

Ethics and Participant's rights

This study adheres to research ethics and I assure you that:
- The study will not interfere with your activities
- You will not be identified or named
- You will not be assessed or graded
- You can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Thank you for considering this.

Participant's Consent

Signed……………………Printed name…………………………….

Secondary school…………………Date……………………………

Appendix D. Interview schedule for coordinator

Sex_____Qualification_____Years of experience____

1. How do student teachers get allocated to particular schools? What do you take into consideration?

2. Does the college sign contracts with schools that take student teachers on teaching practice?

3. How does the college organize training of its supervisors for teaching practice?

4. Does the college organize training for school teachers for teaching practices? How effective are teachers in helping student teachers during teaching practice?

5. What professional qualifications and experience do you expect cooperating teachers to have? What actually happens?

6. What teaching practice related problems do supervisors experience and what effect do those problems have on student teachers?

7. What problems to student teachers experience during teaching practice?

8. What type of support do you expect teachers and supervisors to give to student teachers?

9. What do you expect to be the maximum number of periods/week a student teacher should be assigned?

10. What changes, if any, would you propose to the conduct of teaching practice?

Appendix E. Interview schedule for supervisors

Sex_____Qualification_____Years of experience_____

1. What are the purposes of teaching practice?

2. What do you think student teachers learn from teaching practice?

3. In your opinion, do you think student teachers make use of the things they learn during teaching practice experience once they join teaching?

4. What problems do student teachers ask you when you visit them on teaching practice? Do you have any stories about their problems?

5. What type of support do you think is available to student teachers from teachers in their schools of placement? Is it good or poor? Is it detailed or general? How different is school support different from your support?

6. What do you see as the major problems that student teachers face on teaching practice experience? Are they classroom, personal, organizational or management problems? What effects do the problems on the performance of student teachers on teaching practice?

7. Do you notice a clear transition of student teachers from college to school? Do student teachers struggle in the transition?

8. To what extent do student teachers apply the ideas that they learned in college? Please explain.

9. What have you observed to be the number of teaching periods student teachers have been assigned? What do you think is the reasonable number? Why is that reasonable?

10. What changes, if any, would you propose to the conduct of teaching practice?

Appendix F. Critical incident log guide

Name _____Year of study_____Sex _____

Secondary school _____

Form (please circle)　　1　　　　　　　　3

Week number:

Instructions

Please *record critical incidents* and *explain how each critical incident* makes you feel or affect you in your teaching practice.

Note: Critical incidents are events or complications that can adversely influence the individual in their teaching activity. Please record and explain critical incidents at the level of 'classroom context', 'professional context' and 'supervision context'. *Classroom context* refers to classrooms in which student teachers are introduced with the complex nature of learning to teach. *Professional context* is where student teachers interact with various agents, such as teachers, fellow student teachers or peers and other personnel in the wider school life. *Supervision context* is where student teachers come into contact with supervisors from their college. *'Other' critical context* refers to any incident that you may encounter apart from the three above.

(a) Classroom critical incident

(b) Professional critical incident

(c) Supervision critical incident

(d) 'Other' critical incident

Appendix G. Interview schedule for third year student teachers

Name_____Sex _____

School_____Subjects _____

Becoming a teacher

1. Why did you join the teacher programme that you are studying on?

2. Do you think you want to become a teacher or not? If not, what would you like to become?

School Description

3. Who decided on your teaching practice placement and what do you think about the school?

4. Describe your teaching practice secondary school in terms of available resources and location?

5. How many teaching periods per week have you been allocated? Is this reasonable? Did you have any say in the number of periods?

6. Are the teaching periods manageable for you as a student teacher?

7. How many pupils are in your classroom? Are they the right number to help you learn how to teach? What difficulty does this pose for you and how do you get support? What would you regard as the right class size for you as a student teacher?

Supervision

8. How much would be appropriate for you to be visited by college lecturers during the six week period of your teaching practice?

9. Which lecturers visited you during teaching practice?

10. What do you feel about any feedback that you get from the college lecturers when they visit you?

11. How has the supervision experiences in your teaching practice affected you?

School support

12. Who gives you most help during TP? And what different support do you get from each of these?

13. Who do you expect to give you most of the support?

14. What other professional support do you expect when conducting teaching practice?

School experiences

15. Please comment on these aspects of teaching. Which aspects do you find difficult, or easy? Why? What help do you get?

Lesson planning and preparation

Lesson presentation

Deciding on appropriate teaching methods

Classroom management and control

Finding appropriate teaching materials

16. Comment on which of the following that you get support and for which did you get no support?

Lesson planning and preparation

Deciding on appropriate teaching methods

Classroom control

Finding appropriate teaching materials

Ability to express myself

Knowledge of content to be taught

Teaching practice conduct

17. What do you think about the length of this six week TP?

18. What three things you feel you have learned from your TP experience.

19. What three things frustrated you most during teaching practice?

20. Please suggest up to three things that could be done to improve TP.

21. What do you think pupils in the class you are practice teaching regard you, as someone learning teaching or someone qualified teaching them? How do they treat you?

22. What do you consider to be the role of college supervisor in your teaching practice?

23. What do you consider to be the role of cooperating teacher in your teaching practice?

College teacher learning

24. What teaching style were you recommended to apply when you start teaching, was it pupil centred or teacher centred?

25. What difficulties do you encounter when you try to apply the recommended teaching style?

26. Do you think you will be applying the recommended style when you finish your programme of study in college? Why or why not?

27. What teaching style do you see being commonly used by other qualified teachers in your school?

38**.** Think back to your teacher learning in college and say how teaching was conducted.

29. What changes do you suggest to be made to the teaching practice to make it more effective?

Appendix H. Interview schedule for second year student teachers

Name_____Sex_____Subjects____

Becoming a teacher

1. Why did you join the teaching programme you are studying on?

2. Do you think you want to become a teacher or not? If not what do you want to become?

School Description

3. Who decided on your teaching practice placement and what do you think about the school?

4. Describe your teaching practice secondary school in terms of available resources and location?

5. How many teaching periods per week have you been allocated? Is this reasonable? Did you have any say in the number of periods?

6. Are the teaching periods manageable for you as a student teacher?

7. How many pupils are in your classroom? Are they the right number to help you learn how to teach? What difficulties does this pose for you and how do you get support? What would you regard as the right class size for you as a student teacher? Why?

Supervision

8. How much would be appropriate for you to be visited by college lecturers during teaching practice?

9. What do you feel about any feedback that you get from the college lecturers when they visit you?

10. How has the supervision experiences in your teaching practice affected you?

School support

11. Who gives you most help during teaching practice? And what different support do you get from each of these?

12. Who do you expect to give you most of the support?
13. What other professional support do you expect when conducting teaching practice?

Theory and Practice

14. Think back to your teacher learning in college and say how teaching was conducted

15. What do you think is the amount of microteaching that is used during your training? How helpful is it?

16. What do you think about the balance between theory and practice on the course, is it   appropriate or not? Please explain.

17. What method of teaching is encouraged to be learned and used when you start your own teaching?

18. What methods of teaching are used by tutors in college? How helpful is that for you in adopting the recommended methods to be used in secondary school?

19. Which parts of the course are most easy, difficult, and most difficult?

Conduct of teaching practice

20. What do you think about the length of teaching practice?

21. What three things you feel you have learned from your teaching practice?

22. What three things frustrate you most during teaching practice?

23. Please suggest up to three things that could be done to improve TP.

24. What do you consider to be the role of college supervisor in your teaching practice?

25. What do you consider to be the role of cooperating teacher in your teaching practice?

26. What are your views about the best things with doing education course?

27. What are your views about the worst things with doing education course?

Appendix I. Classroom observation questions

Pre-observation interview protocol
1. Please tell me about the lesson you are planning to teach when I observe your class?
2. What is the purpose of the lesson?
3. What do you want pupils to learn or to be able to do because of attending this lesson?
4. Will the lesson you are planning to teach be difficult for you to teach or for any of the pupils? Why, or why not?

5. What activities have you planned for your class?

Post-observation interview protocol
6. How do you feel the lesson went? Why do you say that?
7. Was this lesson difficult for you or for any of the pupils? If yes, why and how was it difficult for you or for any of the pupils?
8. Is there anything you would do differently based on your assessment of today's happenings?
9. Who or what would you turn to for guidance on that? Why?
10. Did you consult anyone regarding any aspect of this lesson? If so, what did you consult with and what sort of advice did you receive?

Appendix J. Lesson observation protocol

Student Teacher:_____Class:_Date:_Subject and topic:____

Time:_No. of pupils:_____

Beginning

Is there an obvious start to the lesson? Describe how it begins.

How the student teacher organizes the lesson and the way the lesson develops. You should be trying to look at the way the student teacher changes the pace of the lesson and how the pupils respond. Does the lesson follow on from previous lessons?

Questions and explanations

What questions does the student teacher ask pupils? Can you recognize different types e.g. closed or open. Are explanations clear to all pupils?

Lesson Aims

From what you observe, what do you feels are the student teacher's objectives for the pupils? (Discuss with teacher after the lesson).

Transitions between stages

Describe the way the student teacher moves from one activity to another. What are the pupils expected to do in various stages? What is the student teacher's role in each stage?

Lesson planning

What has the student teacher had to plan or prepare for before the lesson?

Organisation

How does the student teacher organise each stage of the lesson? When and how is equipment given out and collected in.

Student teacher actions and roles: You might look for: instructing, describing, explaining, questioning, showing, demonstrating, challenging and so on.

Pupil actions and roles: You might look for: listening, questioning, asking, telling, reading, writing, discussing, investigating, imagining, and conjecturing

Managing pupils

Here you should look at how the student teacher manages the behaviour of pupils. How does the student teacher monitor pupil work? Look at how the student teacher handles potential disturbances.

Lesson ending

How does the lesson end? Is there a summing up, review or looking forward? How long is given for packing away

General observation comments

Any comments you have not been able to make elsewhere.

Appendix K. In-depth interview schedule

Interview schedule for student teachers

Now that you have finished teaching practice, I want you to look back to your teaching practice experiences and answer a number of questions.

1. Actions/activities involved in

a. Tell me about some of the things you did during your school teaching practice e.g. teaching, preparing lesson plan, involvement in extra curricular activities?

b. How do you think they helped you prepare to be a teacher? Can you give me some examples?

c. Tell me about some of the activities you did during teaching practice which you found less useful in your learning to teach?

d. Tell me about some of the experiences you encountered during teaching practice which you thought caused problems for you in carrying out teaching practice?

e. Have the problems affected your decision to become a secondary school teacher, how?

f. How do you think the problems could be reduced or solved completely?

g. How do you discuss the teaching practice back in college? How do you feel you benefit from that? Who organizes the discussions?

2. Tools used in the actions/activities

a. Tell me some of the resources, be they tangible or psychological, that you need to successfully carry out learning to teach during teaching practice?

b. What resources were available to you in the school for teaching practice?

c. Tell me some of the resources that were not available to you? How did their absence affect you in you learning to teach?

d. What resources did the other teachers have in the school that you did not have?

3. Rules/norms guiding your day-to-day activities in school

a. Tell me about some of the rules and regulations that the school administration or any member of staff showed you to guide your activities in the school?

b. How easy to follow were the school rules/regulations? Can you mention some of such rules that caused problems?

c. Tell me some of the problems you had with any of the rules and regulations? How did the problems affect you?

d. Did the college brief you on any rules/norms/regulations that govern school operations and your conduct during teaching practice?

e. What did you think about the rules/norms/regulations?

f. Did you notice any contradictions between the college rules and school rules?

4. Community you interacted with

a. Who did you mix with in the school? Who did you have to work with and get on with in school?

b. How helpful were the people you mixed with in your activities?

c. If they were unhelpful, why do you think they were unhelpful? How did that affect you?

d. Tell me about the support you got from other teachers in the school?

c. Tell me if you had sufficient opportunity for professional interaction with other teachers in the school?

e. If some teachers frustrated you, in what ways did they frustrate you?

5. Division of labour, status, power you assumed

a. Tell me about the roles and responsibilities you took up in your teaching practice school?

b. Tell me how you were given those roles and responsibilities?

c. How did you find the roles and responsibilities? Were they challenging, if so, how and why?

d. Do you think there were other roles that could help you but the school did not give them to you? Why do you think the school did not give them to you? How did that affect you?

e. Tell me about the amount of work you were given in the school? Was it manageable? What problems did you encounter and how did that affect you?

f. Tell me about the amount of work you had after-school work. Tell me about the amount of administrative work you had to do, was it reasonable?

g. Was your status of student teacher respected in the school? What was the effect of that on you? How did other teachers treat you?

h. Tell me about the amount of authority you had in the school? Was it reasonable authority? Was your authority ever defied? Who defied your authority? Why? How did that affect you?

6. Subject, object, outcome

a. Tell me about what you have learned during teaching practice?

b. What do you think you failed to learn during teaching practice and why do you think you failed to learn that?

c. How would you want teaching practice to be organized?

7. Activity setting

d. Tell me about your teaching practice school in supporting your teaching practice? Why do you say so?