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**Teacher Educators' Understanding and Experiences with Implementing the Initial  
Primary Teacher Education Policy in Malawi**

**Grames Chirwa Ph.D.**

*Mzuzu University, Malawi*

**Gabriel Kamweta B.Ed.**

*Mzuzu University, Malawi*

**Devika Naidoo Ph.D.**

*University of Johannesburg, RSA*

**Doreen N. Myrie Ed.D.**

*Jackson State University, USA*

### Abstract

*The initial primary teacher education (IPTE) curriculum policy was revised in 2016 and implemented in 2017 in Malawi (Ministry of Education, 2021). This study investigates teacher educators' (TE) understanding and experiences in two teacher training colleges. The study is informed by the cognitivist theory of Spillane et al. (2002). Following a qualitative research design, data were collected through face-to-face interviews with teacher educators and principals. Classroom lesson observations were used to triangulate interview data. Data analysis showed that teacher educators' superficial understanding of the espoused goals, content, and pedagogy of the IPTE impedes effective teacher education. The study found that the implementation of the revised IPTE curriculum is constrained by ineffective re-education and orientation of lecturers to the revised curriculum; unavailability of qualified lecturers; the duration and mode of training; the lack of teaching and learning resources; and TEs that are not being supported by the Ministry of Education officials. The study also shows that superficial understanding and ineffective implementation of the IPTE policy by educational stakeholders, such as lecturers, also comprises the quality of primary teacher education in Malawi. Based on the findings, several recommendations are made to improve the implementation of the IPTE in the country. These recommendations have implications both in Malawi and beyond.*

**Keywords:** cascade model, curriculum implementation, initial primary teacher education, professional development, teacher education

### **Introduction**

The quality of teachers produced in any country is greatly shaped by the government's teacher education policy, including the curriculum offered to the student teachers during their training period (Jadhav & Patankar, 2013). To improve the quality of teacher education in Malawi, the initial primary teacher education (IPTE) curriculum was revised (MoEST, 2016). The article explores teacher educators' understanding and experiences of implementing the revised IPTE curriculum and how this understanding shapes teacher training practices in the teachers' training colleges in Malawi.

One of the key changes in the curriculum in Malawi in recent years is the introduction of a teacher education philosophy to train trainers' courses (Ministry of Education, 2016). The teacher education philosophy is expected to guide the training of student teachers (Ministry of Education, 2021). In addition to the teacher education philosophy, another key innovation in the curriculum is critical thinking pedagogies (Ministry of Education, 2016). According to the Ministry of Education (2021), critical thinking pedagogies are problem-based learner-centered, participatory, and interactive methods of teaching and learning which encourage learners to be critical of their social realities and encourage them to suggest possible solutions to the social problems affecting their daily lives. Critical thinking pedagogies have been adopted in this new curriculum as the major pedagogical approach to training student teachers. The Ministry of Education saw it necessary to introduce critical pedagogies to make teaching more learner-centered because these pedagogies make learners own learning and become engaged participants. The revised IPTE curriculum also stresses the integration of cross-cutting issues such as Inclusive Education and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with critical thinking skills to produce a teacher capable of steering Malawi's public education into the future.

The new IPTE curriculum aims to produce competent and responsive teachers who will effectively deliver quality education to students in all the subjects of the primary school curriculum. The IPTE focuses on producing a reflective, autonomous, and lifelong learning teacher who can display moral values and integrity whilst embracing learner diversity (MoEST, 2016), in line with the whole schooling principles.

The reviewed IPTE curriculum is a two-year program with a new program structure. The previous IPTE program used two years of theory training for learners in college, and after that, they went out for teaching practice in primary schools. The new IPTE program follows the pattern of 2-2-2 or 2-in, 2-out, and 2-in. The 2-2-2 pattern means that in the two-year training program, the first two semesters, students will be in college learning subject

content with a special focus on methods for lower and upper classes (grades). The next two out means that in term three of year one and term one of year two, students will be out for teaching practice in primary schools, practicing teaching in the lower and upper classes of the primary school system. The next 2 in, means students come back to college for more instruction with particular emphasis on reflection on their experiences of teaching practice, further practice on teaching methods, content, and various education policies. This structure was adopted in the revised curriculum because it adopts the reflective model of teacher education, which aims to connect practice and theory and integrates content with pedagogy in teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2016).

Teacher education provides the platform for student teachers to acquire the required knowledge, skills, and competencies and to develop positive attitudes and values that enable them to implement the curriculum effectively. The notion of producing a teacher who can embrace learners' diversity in the IPTE means that a teacher trained through the revised IPTE curriculum should effectively teach all learners, lower and upper grades, including learners with exceptionalities in inclusive settings. To this effect, the IPTE curriculum has included content on early-grade learning in the Education Foundation Studies modules (MoEST, 2016) and skills to work in inclusive settings.

The revised curriculum has other features different from the previous or preceding curriculum. For example, unlike the previous preceding curriculum, the revised curriculum consists of early-grade teaching methodologies, Assessment for Learning, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Inclusive Education, and Critical thinking have been designed as major pedagogical approaches for training student teachers (Ministry of Education, 2016). The revised curriculum has also proposed a strong link between pre-service and in-service teachers (MoEST, 2016).

The purpose of primary teacher education in Malawi is to produce and develop competent and responsive teachers who can effectively deliver quality education to all learners under the prevailing conditions and demands in the country's primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2016). The curriculum seeks to achieve this objective by helping the student teachers acquire the right knowledge, skills, and competencies to teach learners effectively. The Initial Primary Teacher Education curriculum has been reviewed and revised to ensure that student teachers who graduate from this program are well prepared for the profession. This new curriculum has adjustments that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) requires teacher educators to utilize in instructing the student-teachers.

The designers of the IPTE curriculum provided training workshops to prepare implementers, that is, the teacher educators, for the implementation of the new curriculum. The training workshops were conducted through the cascade model. The cascade training model involved training Trainers of trainers (ToTs) first, who trained teacher training college lecturers. However, a study by Rembe (2006) in Zimbabwe reveals that the cascade training model needs to be more effective in empowering educators to teach a new curriculum efficiently. Rembe (2006) further argued that the cascade training strategy is substandard in the sense that the majority of educators depend on the competence and skills of those few who were chosen to receive training in order to train others, and this results in poor transmission of information and inadequate to equip teachers with the required skills. He continued to state that the cascade model dilutes information in its dissemination process, making it difficult to determine its effectiveness (Rembe, 2006). Rembe proposed a more direct training of the implementers of a curriculum at the classroom level rather than the trainer-of-trainers approach used in the cascade model.

Teacher educators play a crucial role in the implementation of any curriculum. Teacher educators were the key informants in this study because they make final decisions on implementing any curriculum (Thornton, 2005). The teacher educator instigates change in the teachers' training classroom. Without his/her understanding of a new curriculum, awareness of its importance, and willingness to implement it, the new curriculum will remain just another idea in the field. Yusof et al.(2017) support this view by saying, "it is in the hands of teacher educators that the intended curriculum develops into an enacted curriculum." Given this background, it becomes a necessity that an understanding of the implementation of any curriculum should involve an investigation of the decisions that teacher educators make in enacting the curriculum.

So far, studies on teacher educators' understanding and experience of the IPTE in Malawi are anecdotal, except for the 2018 baseline survey on the implementation of the IPTE program. This survey was conducted by the national curriculum development centre in Malawi, the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), which mainly revealed the shortage of availability of teaching and learning materials in the colleges in the early stages of the implementation of this program. Against this background of the anecdotal information on teacher educators' understanding and experience of the IPTE program, this study set out to investigate, early in the implementation of the curriculum, the understanding and experiences of teacher educators in the implementation of the IPTE.

### **Literature Review**

Research on the implementation of policy, for example, that of Lowe (2008), Ratsatsi (2005), Kadyoma (2003), Mahlangu (2001), Motara (2000), and Jansen (1998) reveals several factors which affect the implementation of a policy. Policy implementers ought to understand and have a clear picture of what they are supposed to do to achieve the goals of the curriculum they're expected to implement (Chaudhary, 2015). Chaudhary argues that educators are supposed to be aware of the educational outcomes for each student to demonstrate within and at the end of the course. Chaudhary further argues that sometimes teachers who are expected to implement the curriculum fail to identify the main features of that curriculum. This situation becomes complicated when teachers are required to change their educational approaches. This argument is supported by Fullan (2001), who also found that teachers needed help identifying essential features of the curriculum they were using in South African schools. Similarly, a study conducted by Park and Sung (2013) in Korea found that teachers needed to fully understand the training they received and were frustrated about what they were required to do with the new curriculum. A study by Tong (2010) in China found that the lack of teachers' understanding of the innovations was among the main reasons China failed to implement its curriculum reforms.

Clarity problems are visible in almost every study of significant change just because the more complex the change is, the more it is expected to encounter more challenges (Fullan, 2001). Badugela's (2012) study revealed that implementing innovations in educational institutions that cannot implement them usually fails to achieve their purpose. Given the above challenges of clarity of the innovation, in Malawi, the curriculum review designers tried to provide content and methodology in the training workshops and orientation courses to minimize the clarity problem (MoEST, 2016). However, the college principals and the teacher educators' understanding and experience of the IPTE need to be clearly understood. Therefore, this study set out to find whether the college principals and their teacher educators are clear on the concepts of the revised curriculum and, therefore, to close this gap.

Fullan (2001) argues that where the implementation of a curriculum involves new behaviors and beliefs, implementers are supposed to be provided with training concerning these requirements (Fullan, 2001). For implementers to competently and skilfully handle the new curriculum, there is a need to provide them with initial education and training (Robbins et al., 2003). According to Yeager and Wilson (1997), implementers' knowledge and classroom practices are shaped by the pre-service and in-service programs. The preparation

of implementers in both content and pedagogical knowledge and their acquirement of great skills may lead to the effective implementation of a new curriculum (Yeager & Wilson, 1997). In agreement with Yeager and Wilson, Fullan (2001) argued that curriculum implementers' development is critical to ensure the effective implementation of a new curriculum because they are connected. Fullan thus emphasizes the significance of in-service and professional development (including orientation to the new curriculum) in support of specific innovations. In support of re-education, Pratt (1980) concluded, "many an excellent curriculum has had insignificant results because its designers limited their horizon to the production of a curriculum rather than the implementation of the program."

The availability of teaching and learning materials is the key to the effective implementation of any curriculum. Ratsatsi (2005) stresses that the availability of teaching and learning materials justifies a new curriculum of its existence as an independent entity requiring space in the school timetable by defining its own independent operational limitations, objectives, axioms, and principles (Ratsatsi, 2005). The curriculum implementation is achieved by defining and adopting its delivery strategies prescribed in new instructional materials. When curriculum implementers have adopted these delivery strategies as stipulated in new instructional materials, the old instructional materials become dysfunctional and redundant (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1990). McLaughlin and Talbert further claim that classroom practices are greatly influenced by both human and material resources, especially in developing countries like Malawi. According to Cheplogoi (2014), teaching and learning materials are part of the factors that affect the effective implementation of a new curriculum. The study conducted in Zimbabwe, as reported by Murava (2017), revealed that schools were confronted by the problem of a lack of teaching and learning materials in an attempt to implement the new curriculum. By the time of implementation, schools still needed to be provided with textbooks as they were not yet published.

The literature review in this article has revealed important factors that may influence the implementation of an education policy, the most important one being that educators make final decisions in the implementation of a policy, but they do so under various constraints. However, most studies on the implementation of policy focus on studying the structural context of implementation, the education institution's management, or leadership. Many studies also concentrate on the contextual factors of educational institutions, such as the social, economic, political, and demographic conditions of an educational institution and how they act as barriers to effective policy implementation. This article, though, focuses on whole schooling factors, that is, the institutional-based factors and

key stakeholders-related factors that affect policy implementation. The article presents a balanced approach to exploring factors affecting policy implementation.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study was informed by Spillane et al. (2002) Cognitive sense-making theory. The theory argues that the cognitive and psychological preparation of implementers impact implementation. In this study, we sought to understand teacher educators' sense of the IPTE. The cognitivist sense-making theory for reframing implementation research holds that implementing agents' sense of policy is influenced by their existing cognitive structures (including knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes), their situation or context, and policy signals. The cognitivist theory moves beyond a behavioral focus and foregrounds that behavioral changes have a fundamental cognitive component. Thus, the cognitive approach focuses on individual cognition, situated cognition, and policy signals. Individual cognition refers to how the individual's beliefs, values, and emotions influence the sense-making process. Individuals interpret and construct new policy knowledge based on prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. The new ideas are subject to the danger of being seen as minor variations of what is already understood rather than as different in significant ways (Spillane et al., 2002). Situated cognition refers to how the individual agent's context is critical in shaping her or his sense of the change. A situated cognition perspective holds that the situation is constitutive of the sense-making process. The third factor that shapes the implementing agent's sense of the change is policy signals. Policy signals refer to how ideas of the new policy are represented and disseminated to schools and teacher educators. This would include what is emphasized in policy and the strategies for implementing and monitoring the change. The implementing agent must first notice, then frame, interpret, and construct the meaning of policy changes. Factors contributing to policy failure include prior knowledge; different interpretations of the same message; new ideas seen as familiar and assimilated; understanding that may focus on superficial features rather than on deeper meaning; and the values and emotions of implementing agents.



### **Methodology**

This study embraced a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was amenable to the study's objectives, which sought to get insight into the college principals' and teacher educators' understanding of experiences of the new IPTE curriculum and the cognitive sense-making theory that informs the study. A qualitative study assumes multiple realities are socially constructed through individual and collective definitions of a situation (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Thomas, 2013). This research focused on principals and teacher educators of English and Religious Education in Teacher Training Colleges. The study assumed that teacher educators construct realities in their classrooms individually and through interactions with learners. Furthermore, in doing so, they adapt, transform or interpret a curriculum to suit their situations.

This study used a multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2015). The case study method enables the study of things in detail. "With case studies, it is possible to gain a unique perspective of a single individual or group" (Denscombe, 2003). This study was a case study because it focused on teacher educators and principals in two TTCs. It sought to investigate challenges faced by teacher educators in implementing the IPTE curriculum with specific teacher educators within specific contexts. The study adopted the interpretivism paradigm. This paradigm seeks to understand and interpret meaning based in natural settings. This study sought to understand curriculum implementation through the interpretation of the experiences of teacher educators in Teacher Training Colleges.

This study used a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a strategy to choose small groups or individuals likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest. The study used a sample of six (6) participants. Two of these participants were principals from two Teacher Training Colleges. College A's principal is a male Catholic Church member aged 55. He has a Bachelor of Education degree in primary education obtained from Domasi College of Education. He has been a teacher educator for ten years and served as a principal for seven years. The principal at college B is a female aged 58. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Education from Chancellor College, a constituent college of the University of Malawi. She has been a teacher educator for 22 years and has served as principal for six years at the present teachers' training college.

The study participants are two English lecturers and two Religious Education lecturers from each college in the sample. The selection of these lecturers was also purposive in that English and Religious Education are the subjects of specialization of the researchers. It was anticipated that the researchers would have a better understanding of the classroom

practices and other related aspects of the English and Religious Education curriculum. Three teacher educators involved in the study were males, and one was female.

In this study, three methods of collecting data were used. The data collection methods were document analysis, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and classroom lesson observations. These methods were chosen because they provided the necessary information that helped the researchers gain insight into the challenges facing the implementation of the new teacher education curriculum. The three methods also complemented each other to provide methodological triangulation in the study (Creswell, 2009). Methodological triangulation helped to cross-check the credibility of the data in this study. This study thus involved different sets of interviews to provide methodological triangulation for the study. These interviews comprised college principals' semi-structured interviews, teacher educators' pre-lesson observation interviews, and follow-up post-lesson observation interviews. The analysis of official documents was the primary means of investigating the 'intended' way the revised curriculum is expected to be implemented by the Teacher Training Colleges. This included the content, teaching, assessment methods, and resources to be used by the teacher educators in the classroom as prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The term 'official documents' in this study refers to curriculum policy documents relating to the 'intended' curriculum with information on the content and pedagogy of the curriculum, such as the Initial Primary Teacher Education Curriculum and Assessment Policy Framework.

Apart from official documents, 'documentary sources' were also studied to investigate the 'intended' way in which the revised IPTE curriculum is expected to be implemented in the schools. The term 'documentary sources' in this study refers to both official and other relevant written materials obtained from the colleges, such as schemes of work, lesson plans, and notes.

The results of the study were analyzed using the thematic content analysis method. According to Creswell (2009), this method of data analysis is described as a way of analyzing data by organizing it into categories based on themes, concepts, or similar features. The interview and class observation data were first coded with this data analysis model. According to Cornbleth (1990), coding involves dividing or segmenting data into topics or categories. The different codes represented different themes. The themes used broadly related to the different factors that influence the implementation of a new curriculum reviewed in the literature of this study.

Concerning research ethics, the researchers got permission from the Department of Teacher Education and Development and the principals of the Teacher Training Colleges to conduct the study.

All names of participants and those of their Teacher Training Colleges were represented with pseudonyms throughout this study in accordance with the standard research ethics requirements of the Department of Teacher Education and Development in Malawi. For example, the two colleges studied were given pseudonyms “A” and “B.” The two principals’ pseudonyms were “John” and “Mary.” The teacher educators who participated in the study were referred to as “Jacob,” “James,” “Peter,” and “Andrew.” The consent of the participants interviewed and observed teaching lessons were obtained in order to proceed.

### **Findings**

The data analysis was guided by the research questions. The main research questions asked in the study were, firstly, what are the teacher educators’ views of the training they were given to prepare them for the implementation of the IPTE curriculum? Secondly, what is the teacher educators’ understanding of the teacher education philosophy from the training they were given? Thirdly, what are the challenges that teacher educators are experiencing in implementing the IPTE curriculum, and fourthly, how can the implementation of the IPTE curriculum be improved? Findings to these questions led to the following key themes: inadequate understanding of the IPTE’s key innovation, the teacher education philosophy, and use of the philosophy to guide teacher training; shortage of qualified teacher educators for different subjects or learning areas; inadequate training of teacher educators; unavailability of teaching and learning resources; inadequate college-based in-service training and classroom supervision; and lack of regular inspection and monitoring support from curriculum developers and supervisors. These key findings are presented and discussed below.

#### **Inadequate understanding of the teacher education philosophy of the IPTE**

Data on the responses to the question of what are the teacher educators’ understanding of the IPTE teacher education philosophy from the training they were given to prepare them for the implementation of the IPTE curriculum revealed that teacher educators have an inadequate understanding of the IPTE teacher education philosophy. For example, the teacher educators’ responses below show that they have an inadequate understanding of the teacher education philosophy:

*“During training, we were told that the new curriculum would be guided by five education philosophies and other issues like critical thinking strategies. As of now, I can only remember about reflective teacher, autonomous teacher, and life-long learning teacher. Yes, that is what I can remember so far. Another thing I have observed is that it is difficult to use the philosophies in this college because of a lack of resources like modules, internet. I doubt if we are going to achieve these philosophies,”* stated Jacob.

Similarly, Andrew indicated that he only knew three of the elements of the teacher education philosophy. He remarked, *“I know that the curriculum is guided by five philosophies, that is producing autonomous teacher, producing reflective teacher, producing life-long learning teacher, but I have just forgotten the others, I need to check again.”*

The above responses from the teacher educators show that at a banal level, teacher educators are not conversant with the teacher education philosophy. For example, three of the four teacher educators involved in the study only remembered to mention the first three components of the philosophy. They could not completely explain their meaning and implications in their student-teacher training.

When further asked if they were able to utilize the components of the teacher education philosophy to guide their teaching, one of the teacher educators responded, *“I am not sure if it is happening... may be it happens naturally because sometimes you may not actually know that you are achieving which philosophy...but with the reflective teacher philosophy, I know I do achieve that one...especially when we are asking them about experiences in Teaching Practice.”* (Andrew).

Another teacher educator referred to the five components of the teacher education philosophy as essential and relevant but a white elephant....*these philosophies, the way I see them are good for our education in Malawi, but I'm hopeless if we are going to achieve them anyway, I foresee problems like lack of resources....”* (James)

Inadequate knowledge of the teacher education philosophy by teacher educators was also confirmed in classroom lesson observations. In one of the lessons observed, lecturers did not engage female student-teachers adequately during the lecture class. In another lesson observed, throughout the one-hour lesson, only one female student-teacher was given a chance to respond to the teacher educator's questions, although many girls showed interest in responding to questions by raising their hands. It was observed that male students were the ones mostly nominated to respond to questions. This revealed that learner diversity was not being modelled in the lecture. During post-lesson observation interviews, when asked to

reflect on her lesson and if she had made any effort to ensure consideration of student diversity, the teacher educator blamed herself for failing to engage female students in the lecture class.

### **Ineffective orientation training of teacher educators**

For the revised IPTE curriculum to be implemented effectively, the Ministry of Education, through the Malawi Institute of Education, planned to orient teacher educators and principals to the new curriculum. The purpose of the training was to familiarize teacher educators with the revised IPTE curriculum. The teacher educators in the study were asked about their views of the training they received to prepare them for the implementation of the IPTE curriculum. Teacher educators responded that;

*“The training was not effective...the days of the training were not enough.”* (Jacob). The other teacher educators who participated in the study, James, Peter, and Andrew, concurred with Jacob that the training did not prepare them effectively because it was superficial. *“Not adequate information was given... it was a short training... three days was not enough to cover all the important stuff.”* (James)

Similarly, principals from the two colleges involved in this study claimed that the orientation did not adequately prepare teacher educators to teach the new IPTE curriculum effectively because it was short training. *“The training took 3-5 days, and this was a short period to prepare lecturers to implement a new curriculum effectively. Even myself, there are a lot of new things I need to learn.”* (Mary)

The participants' responses in the study showed that the short duration of the orientation compared to the vast amount of content during the training was one of the main factors that led to the training's ineffectiveness. The participants complained that covering too much content within a short period made it difficult for teacher educators to understand the IPTE curriculum in-depth. The teacher educators' responses on their perceptions of the quality of training to enable them to implement the revised IPTE curriculum effectively revealed that the training was ineffective.

In addition to the short duration of the training and volume of content, the teacher educators also expressed concern with the training approach whereby the teacher educators oriented each other at the college level. The teacher educators remarked that *“In fact they used our fellow lecturers to train us and their presentations in the trainings were superficial”* (Jacob). Similarly, Andrew complained of the facilitators' lack of adequate content knowledge; *“Even some of the facilitators lacked knowledge when demonstrating these methods, and many things in the module were not tackled.”* The teacher educators'

perceptions of the effect of the training using the cascade model training resulted in an apparent dilution of information which rendered the training ineffective.

Data from classroom lesson observation confirmed the superficiality of the orientation. Lessons observed at both colleges under study showed that lecturers presented lessons that needed more clarity of lesson purpose and use of information and communication technology. It was also observed that teacher educators needed help with lesson presentation. This was contrary to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology's expectations on how the revised curriculum is expected to be implemented by teacher educators.

### **Unavailability of teaching and learning resources**

This study sought to determine the challenges teacher educators face in implementing the revised IPTE curriculum regarding the availability of Teaching and learning resources in the two colleges under study. As argued in the literature of this study, teaching and learning materials are pre-requisite to successful teaching, learning, and implementation of any curriculum (Ratsatsi, 2005). Teacher educators were asked about the availability of Teaching and Learning resources for implementing the IPTE curriculum in their colleges. Teacher educators remarked, *"we do not have adequate chemicals and equipment in our laboratories. The listed stock has old and almost expired chemicals. With this new curriculum, the Ministry of Education needs to supply us with new science teaching and learning materials, but it has not done so yet"* (John).

Concurring with John, Mary added, *"Most materials in the lab are in poor condition and outdated. I expected that the Ministry of Education would bring new materials when the new curriculum was introduced in colleges but nothing has been brought yet."* When asked how the teacher educators are coping with the situation, teacher educators remarked, *"I don't know...I don't know what the lecturers do there... it's a difficult situation...they improvise some of the things which they feel they can improvise."* (Mary).

The study has found inadequate availability of science materials, syllabuses, modules, Teaching and Learning resources for students with special learning needs, and Information and Communication Technology resources. The study revealed that the two colleges have poorly stocked science laboratories.

In addition to the shortage of Science teaching and learning resources, data also revealed a need for more student modules in the colleges.

Modules are the leading textbook for student teachers in the new IPTE Curriculum. The Ministry of Education's recommended ratio of modules to student-teachers is 1 to 1 for each subject. However, data on the status of the availability of students' modules revealed

acute shortages of students' modules. For example, the principal of college B indicated that the student-module at the college was 1:4 in each subject area, and the principal of college A indicated that the student-module ratio at the college is 6:1.

The inadequacy of modules was evident in classroom lesson observations. In two of the observations, students did not use modules during lessons. When asked during post-lesson observation interviews why he did not use modules with his students during one of his lessons, the teacher educator explained that *"the modules are in short supply. I usually advise them to refer to the few modules which are in the library later. The modules themselves have also their own problem however, the information in them is shallow. It is not in-depth information."* (Jacob)

The shortage of students' modules can affect the effective implementation of the new IPTE curriculum because the shortage of modules does not offer student teachers adequate opportunities for independent study and research in the classroom and beyond the classroom. Therefore, this could undermine the quality of teacher education in Malawi.

In addition to the shortage of students' modules, data found that there is also a shortage of teaching and learning resources for students with special learning needs. Inclusive education is one of the key innovations that the new curriculum is advocating for. The Ministry of Education's expectation is that student-teachers with special learning needs are fully taken care of in the teaching and learning processes. For this reason, the study wanted to find out if the two colleges involved in this study have adequate Teaching and Learning resources for student-teachers with special needs. Data revealed that both colleges under study have inadequate teaching and learning resources for students with various special needs. For example, the principal of college A complained that *"teaching and learning resources for students with special learning needs are not adequate. There are no materials for those with hearing problems and extremely very few for those with sight problems."*

Therefore, the study found that both colleges have inadequate Teaching and Learning resources for special needs students.

In addition to the shortage of teaching and learning resources for special needs students, the study's data also revealed a need for more Information and Communication Technology resources at the two colleges. The use of Information and Communication Technology in the new curriculum is one of the critical innovations in the new IPTE curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education's expectations, ICT was supposed to be integrated into all teacher training colleges' teaching and learning processes. The study revealed that ICT resources in the two colleges under study are a concern. College principals

complained that their colleges do not have ICT gadgets such as smartphones and computers. For example, the principal of college A remarked, *“The curriculum leans much on technology which is not a familiar phenomenon in our colleges. There are no computers at this college, and students do not have smartphones as well. In addition, the internet network is not reliable, so both lecturers and students can access the internet to access some important academic information.* Therefore, the study established that incorporating ICT in lessons as stipulated in the new curriculum is a challenge due to a lack of resources and an unstable network. For example, Mary commented, *“it is expensive to buy internet bundles.”*

The study has thus established that lack of ICT integration in lessons is affecting the successful implementation of the new IPTE curriculum as well as compromising the quality of teacher education in the two colleges involved in this study.

### **Ineffective college-based in-service training and classroom supervision**

This study sought to investigate whether colleges under study conduct college-based in-service training and supervision related to implementing the curriculum. As argued in the literature, college-based in-service trainings and supervision related to the implementation of the curriculum are vital because they keep teacher educators well-informed and guided in all the areas of the implementation (Yeager and Wilson 2017).

Principals are regarded as curriculum and instructional leaders of curriculum implementation in their colleges. As such, they are expected to plan and organize college-based in-service trainings and plan supervision of the implementation of a curriculum. Principals were asked about whether they supervise their teacher educators’ teaching in the teacher training classrooms and whether they conduct college-based in-service trainings for their teacher educators. The college principals responded that *“we do not usually do lesson observations to check how things are going on in the classroom with the new curriculum because the lecturers do not take these seriously, they rather take seriously those in-service trainings and supervisions which have been initiated externally.”*

This study has thus found that ineffective college-based supervision and in-service training affect the new curriculum’s effective implementation. The study has revealed that the college principals conduct minor supervision and in-service training because these activities are not taken seriously by the teacher educators.

### **Discussion**

One of the objectives of this study was to establish teacher educators’ understanding of the IPTE teacher education philosophy from the training they were provided to prepare



them for implementing the IPTE curriculum. An inadequate understanding of the teacher education philosophy can undermine the successful implementation of the IPTE curriculum. The study found that teacher educators did not adequately understand the teacher education philosophy during orientation and that they rarely put it into practice in their training of the student-teachers as revealed by both interview and lesson observation data. This study's finding concurs with studies conducted by Park and Sung (2013) in Korea and Tong (2010) in China. The study in Korea found that teachers did not understand the training they received and were very frustrated about what they were required to do with the new curriculum. Similarly, in a study by Tong (2010), lack of teachers' understanding of the innovations was among the main reasons why China failed to implement its curriculum reforms.

The ineffectiveness of teacher training and reorientation to the new policy appears to be a common factor that hinders effective implementation. Park and Sung (2013) observed that most teacher trainings are offered as short-term programs involving several hours or days of workshops with limited follow-ups. Similarly, Penuel et al., (2011) stressed that implementing a new curriculum effectively requires onsite training throughout the implementation process. Such training must promote changes in educators' attitudes and perspectives of the new curriculum so the intended innovation can be achieved. Similarly, a study by Rembe, (2006) in Zimbabwe observed that the cascade model contributed to the unsuccessful implementation of a Life skills program.

This study found that the teacher training colleges involved in this study need to have adequate teaching and learning materials. The study's finding on the lack of resources as a compromising factor in the effective implementation of the new IPTE curriculum concurs with Fullan (2007) and Flores (2004). Both Fullan and Flores assert that implementing a new curriculum places additional demands and expectations on educators and schools while the support and resources allocated to them are insufficient for their needs. Fullan (2007) further argues that the insufficiency of resources limits educators' implementation of a new curriculum. The study's findings further concur with those from a study conducted by Penny et al. (2008) in Uganda. The researchers found that the Ugandan government failed to implement its new curriculum program called; the Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP) of 1998 due to inadequate teaching and learning resources with no budget to support it and insufficient training for educators. This study's findings also concur with those from studies conducted by Kadzamira (2006) and Lowe (2008). Both studies revealed that a lack of resources, mainly textbooks affect the successful implementation of curriculum reforms in Malawi.

One of the key findings of this study is that there needs to be more effective college-based classroom supervision by college principals to promote the new policy's effective implementation. Along with Ornstein and Hunkins (1993) and Prinsloo (2007), they also identified that support from principals is one of the necessary conditions for the successful implementation of curriculum subjects. Ornstein and Hunkins (1993) advocated the need for curriculum and instructional leaders (college principals in the case of this study) to spend time visiting teachers in the classroom and plan staff development programs as a critical factor contributing to successful implementation. Prinsloo's (2007) study found that a lack of commitment by some principals to make Life skills Education a success in their institutions undermined the successful implementation of the program. The principals of the Teacher Training Colleges need to assist teacher educators in implementing the IPTE curriculum successfully. This suggestion is in line with UNESCO's (2004) reasoning that educational reforms require practical management skills to ensure that the innovations formulated are implemented successfully.

### **Limitations**

Although this study provides valuable insights on the experiences of teachers, some limitations are realized. There are eight public Teacher Training colleges in Malawi. This study, however, was conducted in two Teacher Training colleges only. The study's findings can therefore not be generalized to all other TTCs in Malawi. However, the study has provided important insights into the challenges facing the implementation of the new IPTE curriculum in Malawi.

### **Conclusion**

The main aim of this study was to investigate TEs' understanding and experiences in implementing the revised Initial Primary Teacher Education curriculum. The main research questions asked in the study were, firstly, what are the teacher educators' views of the training they were given to prepare them for the implementation of the IPTE curriculum? Secondly, what are the teacher educators' understanding of the teacher education philosophy from the training they were given? Thirdly, what are the challenges that teacher educators experience in implementing the IPTE curriculum, and fourthly, how can the implementation of the IPTE curriculum be improved? In response to these questions, the study has found that firstly, teacher educators have inadequate understanding of the IPTE's key changes, namely, the teacher education philosophy, and use of the philosophy to guide teacher training. Secondly, there is a shortage of qualified teacher educators for different subjects or learning areas. Thirdly, there is ineffective training of teacher educators. Fourthly, there is an

unavailability of teaching and learning resources. Fifthly, there is ineffective college-based in-service training and classroom supervision; and lack of regular inspection and monitoring support from curriculum developers and supervisors.

It is recommended that the factors impacting the effective implementation of the IPTE curriculum as experienced by teacher educators based on this study need to be addressed by the key stakeholders of teacher education in Malawi, such as the Ministry of Education. For example, the training of teacher educators for the implementation of IPTE needs to be revisited. The use of the word 'training' is not productive as it leads to less than optimal time/duration of the training, the cascade model of delivery, and failure in successful implementation. Because shifting individual cognition requires deep engagement with the philosophy of the IPTE the nomenclature 'training' ought to be reframed as re-education in the new teaching philosophy of the IPTE. Additionally, the resources that are required ought to be provided. The lack of provision of resources for implementation is a recipe for policy failure, as it has been in the implementation of the IPTE. Furthermore, regular support ought to be provided to principals and TEs.

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