Headteacher Preparation in Mzuzu, Malawi, Africa

Nathalis Wamba[1]

[1] Department of Educational and Community Programs, Queens College, New York, USA

Correspondence: Nathalis Wamba, Department of Educational and Community Programs, Queens College, CUNY, 65-30 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing, New York, 11367, USA. Tel: 1-718-997-5256. E-mail: nathalis.wamba@qc.cuny.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this researcher was to examine the in-service experiences of seven headteachers in Luwinga ward in Mzuzu, Malawi, and the challenges they encountered in their first year on the job. A modified version of the questionnaire and interview guide developed by the members of the International Study of the Preparation of Principals at the University of Calgary, Canada was used to conduct this study. The collected data were clustered, coded, analyzed and interpreted. The findings suggest that opportunities for pre-service and in-service headteacher training in Mzuzu are almost nonexistent. Training is ad hoc, idiosyncratic and does not seem to follow a specific pattern. Criteria for the selection of headteachers include a successful record of teaching, prior record of leadership in school or outside, religious affiliation, a university certificate or degree and last but not least political influence. In the last section, the author offers recommendations.

Kewords: headteacher, preparation, Mzuzu, Malawi

1. Introduction

Malawi is a landlocked country located in the Southern part of Africa below the equator. It is bordered by Tanzania in the North, Mozambique to the East, South and half way West and Zambia in the North West. The country covers 119,140 square kilometres of which 20% is covered by Lake Malawi. The country became independent from British colonial rule in 1964. English is the official language used for communication in business and commerce and is also used as the language of instruction in all levels of education except in standards 1 to 4 of primary school (Milner, Chimombo, Banda, & Mchikoma, 2001) as of the writing of this paper.

Malawi is divided into three regions: North, Centre, and South (Chiwaula, 2008) and comprises 26 districts. The population is about 16 million people. It is one of the poorest countries in Africa. The per capita gross national income is about US $224 per year. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the population is categorized as poor and live on US $ 1 or less a day and fifteen percent (15%) is categorized as ultra poor living on less than US $ .50 a day. Poor health and social indicators, such as, low literacy levels, high infant mortality rates, life expectancy at birth of 54 years continue to characterize poverty in the country (National Statistical Office, 2009). The legacy of HIV/AIDs has severely affected the country. One hundred and ten thousands people (110,000) are infected annually. Eleven percent (11%) of the population is HIV positive.

As a result several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have flooded the country working in the education, health and economic sectors. The two major donors of financial assistance to Malawi are the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank, also an institution under the leadership and control of the United States. The World Bank has elevated itself into the role of the "super think tank among the aid agencies that, based on its extensive analytical work, knows what is good for the recipient countries but also what other agencies should support" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012, p. 5).

This study grew out of my work as a Fulbright scholar at Mzuzu University in Mzuzu, Malawi, where I worked with a community-based organization and eight primary schools on a school improvement project designed to provide professional development to teachers and headteachers. Malawi has limited Teacher-Training Colleges where primary and secondary school teachers are trained. Pre-service training for teachers takes two years. However, there are no formal training institutions for headteachers despite the fact that the relationship between successful school leadership and effective school has been firmly established in scholarly literature. The

appointment of headteachers in Malawi is ad hoc or follows an apprenticeship model in which upcoming headteachers learn from current headteachers (National College for School Leadership, 2001; Bush, 2003). The lack of school leadership preparation programs prevents Malawi in its efforts to reach its education Millennium Development Goals and carries implications for NGOs working in the education sector. Moreover, research on the preparation of school leaders is sparse and almost nonexistent in Malawi. Aid agencies providing educational assistance to Malawi can benefit from knowing what is in place so that they can tailor their assistance accordingly.

The lack of formal headteacher preparation programs in Malawi led to the investigation of the in-service experiences of a group of seven school headteachers in Luwinga ward in Mzuzu, Malawi, and the challenges they encountered in their first year on their job.

2. Rationale for This Study

Why study the preparation of school leaders in Luwinga in Mzuzu, Malawi? What is the relevance of such study to an international audience? First, Globalization has spearheaded a transnational school reform movement shepherded by Non-Governmental Organizations and aid agencies working in the education sector in many developing countries especially in Sub-Sahara Africa including Malawi. For so many years developing countries have witnessed the uncritical imposition, adoption or transfer of school effectiveness assumptions and Western models of school improvement to developing countries without due considerations and sensitivity to these countries socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts. Second, helping nations and NGOs must understand that one way to assist developing nations in making school improvement is through helping them build capacity and promoting homegrown leadership through empowerment rather than creating new mechanisms of dependency. Third, although claims of international curriculum for the development of school leaders have been made they still have not been tried nor tested in non-Western contexts. Lastly, while some countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana have produced some useful research reports on the preparation of headteachers, Malawian scholars have still yet to produce such research.

This paper proceeds with a review of literature on the preparation of headteachers in sub-Sahara African countries followed by a description of the research method, sample, instrument, data collection and analysis used in this study. Findings and implications are discussed followed by recommendations and conclusion.

3. Review of Literature

Conducting a review of literature on the preparation of education leaders in Malawi is challenging because research on the topic is almost nonexistent. First, I searched ERIC, psychInfo, EBSCOhost EJS, and ABI/INFORM using the following keywords headteacher, school administrator, principal and school leader. The search yielded no articles on the preparation of headteachers in Malawi. Second, I conducted a hand search of highly regarded peer review journals identified by Oplatka (2004) in the field of comparative education and educational administration leadership (see Appendix A). This search yielded a number of articles on initiatives to train headteachers in South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania (Bush, 2011; Scott, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011; Kitavi & Van der Westhuizen, 1997; Sang, 2010; Oduro, Dachi, Fertig, & Rarieya, 2007) but nothing specific on Malawi. Third, a second hand search of reports issued by aid agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in Malawi in the education sector generated several reports on the work of these organizations but nothing specific on the preparation of headteachers except for three failed attempts by the Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

Bush and Oduro (2006) state what resonates with many scholars who have conducted research on the preparation of headteachers in Africa. "Throughout Africa", they write "there is no formal requirement for principals to be trained as school managers. They are often appointed on the basis of a successful record as teachers with the implicit assumption that this provides a sufficient starting point for school leadership" (p. 362). Oplatka (2004), Herriot, Crossley, Juma, Waudo, Mwirotsi and Kamau (2002) and Kitavi and Van der Westhuizen (1997) provide specific examples. "In Nigeria and Botswana headteachers are not even appointed based on criteria of teaching quality since political connections may be the dominant factor in their appointment" (Oplatka, 2004, p. 434). In Kenya, Herriot et al. (2002), write "many headteachers have been identified as leaders in schools on the basis of dubious qualifications often of a personal nature rather than relevant experience and proven skills in the field of management" (p. 510). Kitavi et al. (1997), point to the fact that the means by which most headteachers are trained selected, inducted and in-serviced are ill-suited to the development of effective and efficient school managers.

South Africa is perhaps the first Sub-Saharan African country to establish a formal education leadership training program known as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE). Although there is less agreement about the kind of preparation required to develop appropriate leadership behaviors, two main options are available to the trainees: preparation pre-appointment or professional development for practicing school leaders after their appointment. The ACE program was piloted in six provinces from 2007-2009 and was offered to serving headteachers, deputy headteachers and school management team members aspiring to become headteachers. ACE was both a university and practice-based program. This emphasis on practice resulted from the fact that although many school leaders hold qualifications in management, their collective impact on school outcomes is mediocre. They focus on achieving accreditation rather than improving schools (Bush, Kiggundu, & Moorosi, 2011).

Other African countries are trying to change the selection process of headteachers from seniority to competency. The training programs that some of the countries have launched to prepare headteachers for the demands of their job are examples of promising practices that have the potential to contribute significantly to the Millennium Development Goals with implication for quality Education for All. For example, Kenya launched the Primary School Management (PRISM) program in 1996 with the goal of improving the skills and competencies of 16,700 headteachers in key areas of school management including; curriculum management, personnel, and management of materials, financial and physical resources. The Head Teacher Support Group (HTSG) provided an unprecedented opportunity for headteachers to meet regularly with other educators, inspectors and community members to discuss pedagogy and school administration related issues.

Several evaluative studies of PRISM revealed the positive impact of HTSG on e.g., school governance, student participation and attendance, admission and retention rates, parents and community participation, gender equity instructional leadership to name a few (Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2005).

Developing countries have experienced the imposition of Western school leadership and management theories that bear little or no similarities at all with their realities (Dimmok & Walker, 2000). Each school is unique and the following contextual factors are likely to be significant in influencing school leadership: school size, level (elementary, primary, secondary, special); school location (urban, suburban, rural); socioeconomic factors; governance… and school culture, values, beliefs and customs of the school. Globalization and education are creating a free flow of ideologies and developing nations are struggling to adapt these ideologies to their social realities. Developing countries are constantly in a catch up mode. Colonial ties are not rescinded and the alleged notion that everything Western is good impedes progress.

The Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank made few attempts at providing formal preparation to headteachers in Malawi. In 1998 the DFID funded the Malawi School Support Systems Programme (MSSSP), a primary headteacher development programme. The training took place at the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) and focused on staff management, classroom best practices, advisement and supervision, teachers' professional development, school development and change management (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2000). For secondary school headteachers, the training was sporadic and took place at Mpemba Staff Training College (Kayira, 2008). Financial constraints and poor planning quickly ended the programme.

In 2000, the World Bank funded the Secondary Education Project (SEP) (World Bank, 2007) designed to train secondary school senior staff in school management, school improvement, effective and efficient use of teaching and learning materials, gender issues in the classroom, HIV and AIDS awareness, financial management, guidance and counseling, classroom management, and training of trainers. The World Bank (2007) reports: a total of 568 managers would be trained. About 724 managers were trained surpassing the target. These included deputy heads of schools, new headteachers, and heads of department as well as the methods advisers. Training of the methods advisers enabled them to increase their capacity to prepare, conduct and monitor training of school-based managers (p. 7).

Despite the rosy picture painted by the World Bank, the programme was beset by so many problems that rendered it unsuccessful. Many headteachers were left out of the initial planning. As a result they resisted any form of programme change in their schools. Second, the lack of cohort training created additional problems. For example, in some schools, a senior staff might have taken the training in the earlier phase of the project. By the time the other staff were trained, some of the staff trained earlier had either retired or been posted away to different schools. Third, after the protest of headteachers, the training organizers realized that they should have included them to make the program successful. Fourth, the training did not provide transformational skills to create buy in for the teachers (Kayira, 2008).

In 2003 the Ministry of Education inspected the secondary schools to assess the impact of SEP school-based management training, it was ascertained that most of the ideas learnt were not being implemented in school (Northern Education Division, 2003). Headteachers who were not invited to the training refused any new ideas.

In 2004 the African Development Bank (ADB) funded the School Management Improvement Programme. The programme was earmarked to train 600 senior staff using the SEP Modules, the same module previously used by the World Bank. In place was also the school management training for conventional secondary schools under Education Sector Support Programme (ESSUP) funded by the World Bank. The purpose of the training was to strengthen management skills. Both programmes were similar to the one developed and funded by the Department of International Development (DFID). Although the DFID programmes were unsuccessful, the World Bank and the African Development Bank insisted on replicating the failed DFID model with the intent to extend it to Teacher Training Colleges. No source from the Ministry of Education in Malawi could confirm that these programmes were still in existence.

In Malawi most appointed headteachers do not receive training. The complexity of school leadership in Malawi where headteachers have to deal with a range of issues including poverty, HIV and AIDS, paucity of teaching and learning resources, poorly trained teachers, overcrowding, limited infrastructure suggests that headteachers preparation cannot be haphazard (Wamba & Mwalughali, 2013; Onguko, Abdalla, & Webber, 2012) or left to chance.

4. Research Method

4.1 Site

This study took place in Luwinga in Mzuzu. Luwinga is a district of Mzuzu, a town located in the Northern part of Malawi. It is the third largest city in the country with a population of about 300.000 people. The town of Mzuzu hosts Mzuzu University, the second largest university in the country. There are eight public primary schools and one secondary school in the Luwinga district.

4.2 Sample

A purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is a process of selecting people who fit the criteria of desirable participants based on their experience or knowledge (Henning, Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Merriam, 1998) and who are willing to share their experiences. My sample included seven school headteachers; five males and two females and age range between 37 and 56. Six of them ran public primary schools. One ran a public secondary school. The six primary school headteachers were recent appointees and the secondary school headteacher was a veteran.

4.3 Instruments

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide developed by members of the International Study of the Preparation of Principals (ISPP) at the University of Calgary, Canada, designed to assess the skills needed for the preparation of headteachers was used (see Appendix B). These tools have been tested, modified and used in a series of case studies conducted in several countries including Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa (Onguko, Abdallah, & Webber, 2012; Slater, Garcia, & Gorosave, 2008; Wildy & Clarke, 2008).

Before the formal administration of the questionnaire I contacted all the headteachers to deliver the questionnaire asking them to examine it and assess whether the questions were understandable and focused on their in-service experiences of headship. Because English proficiency was an issue for a number of participants, I hired a college student proficient in English, Tumbuka and Chewa to translate.

The questionnaires were collected a week later. Participants suggested modifications in the phrasing of a number of questions. They also advised me to drop some of the questions they found irrelevant. The instrument was slightly retooled by removing some questions and reformulating others.

The formal administration of the questionnaire took place two weeks later followed by face-to-face interviews. The interviews took place in a coffee shop in town. They were audiotaped and simultaneously transcribed using the software Dragon.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were organized. Specifically, I clustered all answers to the questionnaire and interview creating two sets of data lining them under the main research question "inquiry about the in-service experiences of headteachers in Luwinga and the challenges they face in their first year on the job". I engaged in an iterative process reading and re-reading the transcribed data and listening to the recording. I coded (Miles & Huberman, 1984) the information, establishing new categories, identifying emerging patterns in each category. I cross-examined all emerging patterns from the responses to the questionnaire and the interviews trying to associate and trying to link them (Dey, 1993). As the evidence was corroborated, I produced the following account.

5. Findings

The findings describe the careers' backgrounds of the participants; how they became headteachers, any training they received and the challenges they faced in their first year on the job.

5.1 Participants' Background

Seven school headteachers participated in this study. Before their current job as headteachers, three of them were strictly classroom teachers with teaching experiences ranging from six to thirty-five years. Five of them were newly appointed headteachers with two years of experience or less. One headteacher worked for the Ministry of Education before being appointed to the headship of a school. He was the veteran headteacher in the group with thirty years experience. The other three participants held various positions in the school in addition to teaching duties; one was a school deputy headteacher. She had three years experience on the job. The other was a distinguished teacher who became a Malawi geography chief examiner and had twenty years of experience as headteacher. The third one was a former teacher with three years of experience who decided to go to the university for a certificate in education. Their paths to school headship were unorthodox and unscriptural.

5.2 Becoming a Headteacher

Two participants summarized the path to school headship in Malawi:

"*There are formal and informal ways to become a headteacher in Malawi*". The thirty-year veteran headteacher put it this way: *we have two systems or more in place. First authorities assess you and the result may force them to decide and appoint you. Some are appointed based on denominational value e. g., Catholic, Presbyterian, Adventist (laugh). Others are promoted through substantive promotion. Other people are different. They know somebody in a higher place and they get appointed. This is always a problem*.

A third participant summarized this whole issue by saying:

There is no formal preparation to be a headteacher. As a player you have to show what you are capable of.

As explained by the participants, there is a formal, a semi-formal/informal and an informal way to school headship in Malawi. Perrow's (1979) terminology has reduced this to particularism versus universalism. Particularism means irrelevant criteria (nepotism, political connections etc.,) are used to choose a candidate. Universalism means the selection is made by attempting to match the qualifications of the candidate with the requirements of the position. The formal way to school headship is through appointment by the Ministry of Education after careful assessment of the candidate's teaching records and educational background. The second formal path is through substantial promotion as in a civil service model of recruitment put in place by the Ministry of Education where positions are advertised in the local newspapers so that qualified candidates can compete for them. The third formal path to headteacher is through a university qualification. The semi-formal/informal way is community recruitment based on religious affiliation. Last, the informal way is appointment by the Ministry of Education based on political affiliation or other dubious criteria.

a. Formal Way

❖ Appointment by the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education appoints headteachers based on a successful teaching career as demonstrated by their students' achievement on the national test. While this is one of the criteria used by officials to appoint or select candidates, officials do also consider the candidates' educational background. A participant who was appointed as a headteacher explains:

"*I received a phone call from the Ministry of Education informing me that I was appointed headteacher. I knew I was a good teacher because my students were doing very well on the national test. In fact I was asked to be on the board of national examiners. It was a great honor for me especially as a woman. I felt that I was receiving national recognition for my work.*"

I asked her to explain why she received the phone call since she never applied for the position. She explained that the Ministry of Education keeps files on all the teachers. When the need arises to appoint a headteacher in a specific school, officials at the Ministry review the files of all the teachers in that specific school and select the one with the best teaching record and a decent level of education. In other instances during the inspectorate visits to schools, officials from the Ministry of Education have the opportunity to observe teachers and evaluate them so that when the need arises they can appoint a competent individual to the headship of a school.

❖ Promotion

A participant explained that promotion to the headship through interview is a recent phenomenon that was not in place ten to fifteen years ago. In the promotion scenario, a headteacher position is advertised in the local newspapers. Candidates who are qualified for this position—those with excellent teaching records and leadership credentials—apply and after an examination of their backgrounds are invited for an interview by officials of the Ministry of Education. It is referred to as a promotion because candidates who apply for this position tend to have a substantial background in teaching and leadership. Candidates such as deputy head teachers, department heads, and teacher mentors tend to do well on the interview. For example, a participant who was a Deputy Headteacher applied for a headteacher position advertised in the local newspaper:

"*My appointment was automatic after I had succeeded at the interview.*"

Another interviewee had this to say:

"*In Malawi headship is through hands-on experience and civil service interviews. Hands-on experience include teaching and mentoring other teachers, being a head of a department, followed by formal interview.*"

Individuals who are strictly teachers tend not to apply for headteacher position because of what they perceived as limited leadership experience.

❖ A university qualification

A university qualification in education is almost a sure way for a candidate to get a position as a headteacher because there are limited teacher training institutes in Malawi and universities tend to be rated higher than Teacher Training Colleges. A participant explained how he landed a headteacher position after he completed his certificate in education at a college knowing very well that he was unqualified:

I taught for three years and then I decided to go to Pemba (college) to study, to get a certificate in education. While I was at the college, officials from the Ministry of Education came and they were looking for candidates who could serve as headteachers. They asked the faculty members to identify the candidates that they thought had the leadership skills and I was identified as one of the candidates. When I graduated I was immediately appointed as a headteacher. I did not know anything. I was expecting that the deputy headteacher could help me. But he did not. I made so many mistakes. I wanted to do everything by the book. I did not understand that sometimes common sense was equally important.

b. Semi-formal/informal way

❖ Recruitment through religious affiliation

There are many religious denominational schools throughout Malawi. Missionaries were the firsts to create schools in Malawi. Major religious denominations include but are not limited to Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian, Adventists and others. These schools get government subsidies. In these religious schools, when a vacancy for a headteacher opens up, people in the community can tap a teacher who is known and respected. Community leaders put in a good word for their selected candidate to the District Education Manager to have him or her appoint their candidate as a school headteacher. The District Education Manager approves the candidate, does the paperwork and appoints the individual as the headteacher.

One of the participants shared the following:

I was once a deputy headteacher in a Catholic school. When the old headteacher retired, people in the community wanted me to be a headteacher. From there they appointed me headteacher. I had no higher education!

Recruitment through religious affiliation is often tricky. The candidate who is selected is not always the best candidate. It is very difficult to disentangle whether the appointment is not politically motivated despite the overwhelming community involvement. The above participant made clear that although he was a deputy headteacher in a catholic school, he never had a higher education. This made more sense when a headteacher explained the requirements to become an elementary school teacher:

There are type 2, type 3 and type 4 teachers. Type 2 teachers are high school graduates and have a two-year teaching certificate from a teacher training institution. Type 3 teachers have two years of high school with a two-year junior teaching certificate. And then there are type 4 teachers. These teachers are teachers with a primary education with a teacher certificate. Type 4 teachers are being phased out.

It is from the above pool that future headteachers are recruited.

c. Informal way

❖ Political affiliations/nepotism

Each participant shared a particular story on how they became headteacher. No one ever mentioned that they ascended to the headteacher position through nepotism or corruption. However, I would be remiss if I do not mention that in several instances, participants spoke about dubious appointments. They talked about people who were connected to the political elite, were related to people in higher places. Suffice to say that nepotism and corruption play a role in the appointment of a number of headteachers. This is not to suggest that nepotism and corruption are prevalent in the appointment of headteachers.

5.3 Training

Formal training for headteacher job is essentially nonexistent. However, as was mentioned in the review of literature, the Department of International Development, the World Bank and the African Development Bank organized three short term (a week to a month long) leadership training institutes. These training programmes were available to a select few group of headteachers who were able to take advantage of these institutes.

A number of participants proactively trusted themselves into apprenticeship to develop the skills they needed to become headteachers. Two participants told me that they had the opportunity to attend training institutes and the other five never heard about those institutes. Those who attended these training institutes struggled to transfer the skills they learned to their respective schools. The fact that training was ad hoc and the organizers did not involve headteachers in the program design restricted the potential impact of these training institutes.

Headteachers who were mentored or held a position of leadership prior to their appointment seemed to manage their job much better. For example, candidates who were department heads, deputy headteachers were in a much better position to lead their schools that those who were strictly classroom teachers.

A participant explained how the Ministry of Education dealt with her training needs:

I had no preparation before becoming a headteacher. I was a good teacher. But I had no experience nor preparation to become a head-teacher. Two weeks after I was appointed, the Ministry sent me a booklet… what it means to be a head of a school. You just read that. What is your role as a headteacher. You suppose to check the staff. You receive school fees. How are you supposed to manage the school fees and to deal with the accounting people. And if it is a boarding school, you have to deal with food. That is why most headteachers don't teach, they have too much administrative work.

A second participant shared a different story:

I did not receive any preparation at all except for my training at Pemba Institute. But after few months they gave us a week orientation. They did everything to help us. Some orientation is done but again I am not so sure. Sometimes, they appoint or they chose a deputy headteacher who will learn on the job and they will eventually become a headteacher.

Training for headteachers takes place on the job through trial and error. More importantly, training in headship in Malawi is not as of yet a requirement for appointment as headteacher because of the assumption that good teachers can become effective managers and leaders without specific preparation for their leadership and management roles. Teaching excellence is not necessarily a valid indicator of the management and leadership task of a headteacher. Headteachers for the most come to their position having to rely on experience and common sense. The demands being put on them suggest that acquiring experience can no longer be left to common sense; management support is essential.

5.4 Challenges of the First Year

Evident from these findings is that new headteachers in Malawi step into their positions with limited preparation. The lack of deliberately planned preparation programs for school leaders worsened by the lack of financial resources makes the situation desperate. Participants never talked about administration and management skills and they are trusted to learn on the job. It takes a significant amount of time to develop the leadership and managerial skills necessary to be a good school leader.

The following table (Table 1) summarizes the skills required by the participants to become headteachers:

Table 1. Skills and competencies required for school headteachers

Rank	Cluster	Competence indicators
1	Staff management skills	Ability to work with teachers to promote team work, to manage conflicts, provide professional development, evaluate teachers and staff.
2	Financial management skills	Ability to keep records, to balance books, to judiciously use the petty cash.
2*	Decision-making	Ability to be discriminant in making decision, fairness, integrity, honesty.
2*	School & community	Ability to work with people in the community, including parents, community leaders, community-based organizations, churches etc.
3	School overcrowding	Ability to understand school overcrowding and its implications on staff work and school resources and the ability to develop creative ways to address it.
3*	Resources	Ability to seek external development funds.
3*	Shortage of teachers	Ability to address this issue in working with the community and the ministry.
3*	Strategic Planning	Ability to develop a school vision and a plan to meet that vision

* indicates a tie in their rank.

Most headteachers emphasized training in human resources management.

6. Discussion

Throughout Southern Africa formal leadership training for the preparation of headteachers is seldom offered except maybe in South Africa and Tanzania. In absence of formal training, candidates to headship positions have designed coping strategies to address this situation because they all acknowledge that school headship requires some form of preparation. Most of the participants of this study trusted themselves into some forms of apprenticeship prior to applying for a headship position using what one may call a micro-entrepreneurial skill acquisition strategy. The subject of apprenticeship has not been comprehensively studied, so it remains unclear how effective and efficient the learning component is. One of the participants of this study ran one of the best girls schools in Malawi. His school put more women in colleges than any other school in Malawi. Perhaps apprenticeship needs to be studied to see what it can contribute or has contributed to the professional development of headteachers.

Perhaps the more important question is who cares about the preparation of headteachers in Malawi? Why is this paper relevant? There are a number of reasons people in other countries such as the United States should care about the preparation of headteachers in Malawi. Malawi has partly surrendered its education sector by opening its door to the donor community. Some of the major donors who play a significant role in the education sector in Malawi include but not limited to: the United Sates Assistance in International Development (USAID), the United Nations through UNICEF (United Nations International Children Education Fund), The Department of International Development (DFID), the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC), the International Institute

for Education Planning (IIEP) of UNESCO (United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organization), the Open Society Foundation, the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Sustainable Development Department, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the African Development Bank Group, save the Children Foundation, the World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the International Development Center of Japan Inc. (IDCJ) (Japan International Cooperation Agency & International Development Center for Japan, 2012).

About 40% of the national budget including education was donors-funded in 2001 (Nielsen, 2001). Excessive reliance on outside donors has serious implications for the Ministry of Education. Some donors pressure the Ministry of Education, often demanding educational changes before dispensing aid. Others identify and define the educational needs of the country, and often impose solutions with minimum consultation with the stakeholders. Although this is not the case for all donors, it was the case with the leadership training institutes initiated by the Department of International Development, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. Such an approach contradicts the Policy Framework for Poverty Alleviation Programme produced by the government, which advocates that poor people be "empowered to improve their plight and contribute to national development" (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1997, p. 14).

As the education sector has been taken over by NGOs, there is almost an uncritical adoption of Western models of education being implemented in the country with little chance to succeed. Ogunu (1999) and Rakhashani (1980) who studied principals preparation both in Nigeria and Iran pointed that their systems of education for the preparation of education leaders were inadequate by contrasting them with those in Western countries. They argued that criticisms of leadership preparation in developing nations spring from a deficiency model in which a Western standard is implicitly applied. This deficiency model legitimates Western intervention in its desire to integrate, harmonize and homogenize leadership preparation. Another alternative would be that NGOs willing to work in the education field need to develop a global reach appreciation of the culture and practice of others in order to increase consciousness of one's parameters, strengths and limitations. As Lumby, Walker, Bryant, Bush and Bjork (2009) write "it entails viewing values and practice in location across the world, including one's own, with sufficient openness to reach insights about similarities, differences, and their scale and translating such insights into renewed commitment to and ideas for developing one's own practice" (p. 160). As forces of globalization are bringing people together, our efforts to help developing nations improve their school systems must pay a close attention to socioeconomic and cultural realities; in other words we should begin to introduce a transcultural dimension in our curricula once we understand the realities of those we commit to help.

Engaging with the plurality of education systems with their rich spectrum of values, cultural underpinning and variations is a means of enriching US and other Western countries programs and contributing to the worldwide development of education leaders. This is an argument for recognition, valuing and utilization of differences (Lumby et al., 2009, p. 157).

7. Recommendations

The participants of this study learned their craft through trial and error. However, sink or swim is the harshest way. Headteacher preparation could involve a pre-service training, an induction (a process through which new headteachers are helped to adjust to their new job) and a post-induction/in service (that is lifelong learning through ongoing professional development, workshops, conferences, networking, support groups, critical friends etc.). Recommendations for further research are also appropriate.

7.1 Pre-Service Learning

Taking into account the financial constraints faced by Malawi and the fact that head-teacher training is not made a priority as of yet, a common sense strategy to prepare aspiring headteachers is to assign them to positions of leadership in school coupled with mentoring. A teacher can be assigned to work with parents, community-based organizations, churches, take charge of professional development or be deputy headteacher etc. These aspiring candidates must have a specific job description with clearly stated goals and be accountable to their constituents and to the school headteacher. Developing a manual for procedures that these candidates can use to accomplish their tasks can be extremely useful. The headteacher's role is to provide technical advice on various tasks, rules and procedures and expectations. In-house workshops, feedback and evaluation sessions can be extremely useful in nurturing aspiring headteachers and help them transfer knowledge.

7.2 Induction

Induction is a comprehensive professional development program with articulated goals designed to help beginning headteachers to develop the knowledge, skills attitudes and values needed to carry out their roles effectively. Induction is intended to meet their needs and those of the school (Kitavi, 1995; Kitavi & Van der Westhuizen, 1997). Since this is nonexistent in Mzuzu, one crucial thing for the new headteacher is to be pro-active. It is incumbent upon him or her to outsource or in-source expertise to get the needed help. One way to do this is to enlist the help of a retired headteacher or a veteran headteacher to provide technical advice on various tasks, rules, procedures and expectations. This can be arranged as a mentorship process where the new headteacher has a trusted someone with whom he or she can share his or her experience, frustration and also seek advice.

Other induction activities in Mzuzu can include visits to other schools in order for the new headteacher to see what is happening and to get a glimpse of different school settings; shadowing other school headteachers to experience some of the problems of headship; having the new headteacher invite other headteachers to his or her school for the purpose of getting feedback; attending headteachers meeting (headteachers meet once a month in Mzuzu) for collegiality and professional growth and development; networking with other school headteachers to share concerns and gain support from them by sharing ideas and experiences and finally check with the school district office in terms of any kind of assistance available.

7.3 Post-Induction/In-Service Learning

The post-induction or in-service learning comes after the new headteacher has developed a preliminary level of expertise in running his or her school. Post-induction is making a commitment to lifelong learning by seeking opportunities to grow. This should not be left to the Ministry of Education or the district office but rather to the headteacher. New headteachers should take personal responsibility in preparing and developing themselves through self-study, reading scholarly literature in education (where available), attending seminars and workshops, distance learning, etc. These opportunities to learn can be organized by headteachers by themselves for themselves. Kitavi's (1995) model designed for beginning headteachers can also be applied for lifelong learning for the new headteachers. Her five model components include workshops, seminars, conferences, feedback and evaluation. Other opportunities might include taking class at the university level in leadership training, financial management, decision-making skills etc.

Further research in the preparation of headteachers is essential and carries implications for the overall improvement of the public school system in Malawi. Taking into account the financial constraints faced by researchers in Malawi, I will recommend the following:

❖ Develop small scale research studies on the policies and procedures for the appointment of headteachers throughout districts to create a national picture and to shed light on this urgent issue;

❖ Investigate school critical issues and coping strategies developed by newly appointed headteachers to address them;

❖ Examine alternative mechanisms for headteachers induction into their profession;

❖ Conduct a participatory action research project with headteachers and school administrators to help them develop workshops, seminars, for personal learning and personal growth.

8. Conclusion

Malawi does not have a formal way to prepare its headteachers. This is tragic given the applied nature of the profession and the proven link between effective school leadership and students academic achievement. Headteachers in Malawi are appointed based on a successful record of teaching; prior experience of leadership in school or outside; religious affiliation; a college degree; nepotism or political affiliations. As a result newly appointed headteachers confront a host of issues including lack of staff management skills, financial management skills, decision-making skills to name a few. Other situations compound to sustain the status quo, for example, Free Primary Education, the dependency trap and HIV/AIDS.

NGOs working in the education sector in Malawi cannot afford to ignore the preparation of school leaders and must explore how they can work collaboratively with Malawian educators to design curricula that address the needs of Malawians rather than uncritically import and impose Western curricula. The solution is not whether headteachers should be trained as leader but rather what type of preparation is required to develop appropriate leadership behaviors in Malawi (Bush et al., 2011; Van der Westhuizen & Mosoge, 1998; Gallie, Sayed & Williams, 1997; Hallinger, 2006) that take into account various socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

References

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). (2005). The challenge of learning: Improving the quality of basic education in sub-Saharan Africa. *The Author*.

Bush, T., Kigundu, E., & Moorosi, P. (2011). Preparing new principal in South Africa: The ACE: School Leadership programme1. *South African Journal of Education*, *31*, 31-43.

Bush, T., & Oduro, G. (2006). New principals in Africa: Preparation, induction and practice. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *44*, 359-375. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09578230610676587

Bush, T. (2003). *Theories of Educational leadership and management* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Chiwaula, L. W. K. (2008). Pupil absenteeism in Southern Malawi: The case of Zomba rural and urban education districts primary schools. In *Master Thesis in International Cooperation Studies*. Kobe University, Japan.

Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis. A user-friendly guide for social scientists*. London: Routledge. http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203412497

Dimmock, C., & Walker, A. (2000). Globalization and the societal culture: Redefining schooling and school leadership in the twenty-first century. *Compare*, *30*(3), 3030-3312. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713657474

Gallie, M., Sayed, Y., & Williams, H. (1997). Transforming education management in South Africa. *Journal of Negro Education*, *66*, 460-467. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2668173

Hallinger, P. (2006). Scholarship in school leadership preparation: The unaccepted challenge. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *1*, 1-3.

Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W., & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Herriot, A., Crossley, M., Juma, M., Waudo, J., Mwirotsi, M., & Kamau, A. (2002). The development and operations of headteachers support groups in Kenya: A mechanism to create pockets of excellence, improve the provision of quality education and target positive changes in the community. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *22*, 509-526. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(00)00040-7

Ibrahim, N. (2011). Preparation and development of public secondary schools principals in Kenya. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *1*(9).

Japan International Cooperation Agency and International Development Center for Japan Inc. (2012). *Basic education sector analysis report*. Retrieved from http://gwweb.jica.go.jp/km/fsubject0101

Kayira, J. M. M. (2008). *Management's impact on teaching and learning in Malawian secondary schools* (MP Thesis). Univeritetet I Oslo.

Kitavi, M., & Van der Westhuizen, P. C. (1997). Problems facing beginning principals in developing countries: A study of beginning principals in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *17*, 251-263. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(96)00050-8

Kitavi, M. W. (1995). *The induction of beginning principals in Kenya* (Ph.D. Dissertation). Potchefstroomse Universiteit, South Africa.

Lumby, J., Walker, A., Bryant, M., Bush, T., & Bjork, L. G. (2009). Research on leadership preparation in a global context. In M. D. Young, G. M. Grow, J. Murphy, & R. T. Ogawa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (pp. 157-194). New York: Routledge.

Milner, G., Chimombo, J., Banda, T., & Mchikoma, C. (2001). *The quality of primary education in Malawi: (An interim report) Some policy suggestions based on survey of schools*. International Institute for Educational Planning/UNESCO.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST). (2000). *Teacher development programme: Headship units 1-5*. Zomba: MIE.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from case study research in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.

Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

National College for School Leadership. (2001). *First corporate plan: Launch year 2001-2002*. National College for School Leadership, Nottingham. Retrieved from http://www.ncsl.gov.uk

National Statistical Office. (2009). *Malawi multiple indicators cluster survey 2006*. Final report. Lilongwe, Malawi: National Statistical Office & UNICEF.

Nielsen, H. (2001). The role of donors: How to combine sector program support with devolution? A comment from a practitioner to James Wusch: "Decentralization", local governance and "Recentralization" in Africa. *Public Administration and Development*, *21*, 415-418. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pad.197

Northern Education Division (NED). (2003). *Report on portfolio of work and feedback sessions*. Mzuzu. Northern Education Division Office.

Oduro, G., Dachi, H., Fertig, M., & Rarieya, J. (2007, September). *Examining educational leadership quality in developing countries* (EdQual Working Paper, No. 9.). UK, Department for International Development.

Onguko, B. B., Abdalla, I. M., & Webber, C. F. (2012). Walking in unfamiliar territory: Headteachers' preparation and first year experiences in Tanzania. *Education Administration Quarterly*, *48*(1), 86-115. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11423391

Ogunu, M. A. (1999). *The development of model training program in education planning and management for the preparation of school administrators in Nigeria* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Michigan State University, East Lansing.

Oplatka, I. (2004). The principalship in developing countries: Context, characteristics and reality. *Comparative Education*, *40*(3), 427-448. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000274872

Perrow, C. (1979). *Complex organizations: A critical essay*. Glenville, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Rakhashani, A. A. (1980). *A developmental model for the preparation and continuing education of secondary school principals in Iran* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Wyoming, Laramie.

Sang, J. K. (2010). The preparedness of secondary school head teachers as leaders and managers of schools in Kenya. *Journal of African Studies in Educational Management and Leadership*, *1*(1). Retrieved from www.kaeam.or.ke/articles/vol1/sang fulltext.pdf

Scott, J. M. (2010). *An investigation into the nature of leadership development programmes for South African principals in Gauteng schools*. Research report presented to the School of Education University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the M.Ed (coursework).

Slater, C. L., Garcia, J. M., & Gorosave, G. L. (2008). Challenges of a successful first-year principal in Mexico. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *46*, 702-714. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908299

Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2012). For all by all. The World Bank's global framework for education. In S. J. Klees, J. Samoff, & N. P. Stromquist (Eds.), *The World Bank and Education; Critiques and Alternatives* (pp. 3-20). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-903-9_1

United Nations Development Programs (UNDP). (1997). *Poverty and human development in Malawi*. Lilongwe: UNDP.

Van der Westhuizen, P. C., & Mosoge, M. J. (1998). An emerging vision for education management development in South Africa. *Koers*, *63*, 41-55. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v63i1/2.528

Wamba, N., & Mwalughali, M. (2013). *A grassroots assessment of educational challenges in Luwinga ward schools in Mzuzu, Malawi*. Mzuzu: Mzuzu University Press.

Wildy, H., & Clarke, S. (2008). Principal on L-plates: Rear view mirror reflections. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *46*, 727-738. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09578230810908316

World Bank. (2007). *Malawi poverty and vulnerability assessment: Investing in our future*. Lilongwe, Malawi and Washington DC.

World Bank. (2007). *Implementation completion report (PPFI-Q0450 IDA-30510) on a Credit for Secondary Education Project to Government of Malawi, Washington, DC*. The World Bank. Retrieved from http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT

Appendix A

❖ Comparative   Education Journals

Comparative   Education

Comparative   Education Review

Compare

International Journal of Education Development

International Review of Education

International Journal of Education Research

❖ Educational Administration Journals

Education Administration Quarterly

Journal of Education Administration

Education Management and Administration

School Leadership and Management

School Effectiveness and Improvement

International Journal of Leadership in Education

International Journal of Educational Management

Journal of Educational Change

Appendix B

1. Principal Preparation Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a study investigating the preparation of head teachers in Malawi. Would kindly answer these questions to your best knowledge.

1. Name of the headteacher:……………………………………………………………………

2. Name of the school:………………………………………………………………………..

3. Please describe your school and its context (number of students, their socioeconomic status, etc.)…………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………….…………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

4. When did you become a headteacher?

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

5. How did you become a headteacher? Please explain.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

6. Were you mentored during your professional experiences prior to your appointment as a headteacher? Yes/No

Please explain:………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

……..
……..
……..

7. What is your current job description and how was that informed by your formal and informal headteacher preparation experiences?

……..
……..
……..
………
……..

8. Why did you decide to become a headteacher?

……..
……..
……..
……..
…….

9. What challenges did you face as a new headteacher?

………
……….
………
………
………

10. Identify knowledge and skills you wish you had prior your appointment?

……….
……….
……….
……….
……….

11. Describe your transition from your previous position into the headship?

……...
……...
…….
……...
……...

12. Describe the internal politics associated wit becoming a headteacher.

……...
……...
……...
……...
……......

13. Please tick the appropriate box of each in-service course topic below:

a. Financial management of a school…………………

b. Legal provision in education………………………

c. Conflict management………………………………

d. People management…………………………………..

e. Effective communication……………………………

f. Effective decision-making……………

g. Distributed leadership…………………

h. Time management……………………..

i. School-community relations……………

j. Management of the change process……..

k. Strategic planning/development………...

l. Crisis management……………………….

m. Education technology……………………

n. Curriculum implementation………………

o. Delegation of duties……………………….

p. Other, specify………………………………

Taken and found useful……………………….

Not taken but would like to take………………

Not taken and would not like to take………….

14. Which five skills in the following list would you rate most important, with number 1 being the most important?

a. Financial management of a school……………..

b. Legal provision in education……………………

c. Conflict management……………………………

d. People management…………………………..

e. Effective communication………………………..

f. Effective decision-making……………………….

g. Distributed leadership……………………………

h. Time management………………………………..

i. School-community relations………………………

j. Management of the change process……………….

k. Strategic planning/development…………………….

l. Crisis management………………………………..

m. Education technology……………………………

n. Curriculum implementation……………………..

o. Delegation of duties……………………………..

p. Other, specify…………..………………………

13. Indicate with a tick which organization should deliver instruction on the following topics (University (U); National Training Institution (NTI); Teachers Associations (TA); Other (O) specify):

a. Financial management of a school………………

b.Legal provision in education……………………

c. Conflict management……………………………

d. People management…………………………..

e. Effective communication………………………..

f. Effective decision-making………………………..

g. Distributed leadership………………………….

h. Time management…………………………………

i. School-community relations…………………………….

j. Management of the change process………………………

k. Strategic planning/development…………………………..

l. Crisis management…………………………………………..

m. Education technology…………………………………

n. Curriculum implementation………………………………..

o. Delegation of duties………………………………………..

p. Other, specify…………………………………………….

14. How have bureaucratic requirements influenced your practice as a headteacher?

……..

……..

……..

……..

……..

……..

15. Are there particular personal qualities best suited for headship?

……..

Please identify and describe them……………………………………………………..

………

………

………

THANK YOU

2. International Study of Principal Interview Questions

1. Tell me how you came to be the headteacher of your school.

2. Tell me why you became a headteacher….. (purposeful intent or unexpected opportunity)?

3. What was the process of becoming headteacher?

4. Who influenced you in your decision to become a headteacher?

5. Describe your preparation for the headship.

6. What kind of in-service training did you receive? (e.g., course attended….)

7. What type of institutions, if any, delivered headteacher training that you took?

8. Were there any certification requirements that you had to meet?

9. What are the benefits of the headship? A. Tangible? B. Intangible?

10. What other professional experiences have you had that prepared you for this role? What were/are the transferable skills?

11. Do you have other experiences outside of education? Please describe them.

12. What have been the main difficulties that you have experienced during your first year as a head teacher and how have you handled them?

13. Describe your best and worst experiences as a school headteacher?

THANK YOU

Copyrights