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Unravelling the Barriers to Student-Centred Pedagogy in Malawi: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Despite recent advancements in expanding secondary education and building more educational institutions, the shift to learner-centered approaches remains hindered by various challenges. This research aims to identify and analyze these challenges to improve pedagogical practices aligned with global education standards, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education). This study, focusing on Malawi, investigates the barriers to implementing student-centered pedagogy (SCP) in Malawi. The study adopts a qualitative design, using interviews with teachers randomly selected from different secondary schools regardless of the subjects they teach to gather insights. Thematic analysis, using Atlas.ti 23, reveals inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and resistance to change. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to improving educational strategies in Malawi and similar contexts, providing valuable recommendations for overcoming these barriers to enhance academic quality and meet the goals of national and international development agendas.

Keywords: Student-centred pedagogy; teacher-centred practices; systemic barriers; cultural resistance; professional development; educational assessment; Malawi

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Introduction

Malawi achieved secondary school education expansion through the past years because it supports both the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Malawi's 2063 national development goals. The government focuses on building additional secondary educational institutions throughout distant and disadvantaged areas to create better educational accessibility and quality. The educational facility reconstruction project created a need for additional teachers because the country needs well-trained instructors (Project, 2019; Tetra Tech USAID en of Malawi, 2019). The expansion of educational institutions has not fixed the problems that affect pedagogical methods, specifically the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy (LCP), in delivering quality education (Institute, 2023), 2023). The academic approach enables critical thinking and problem-solving through active student involvement because it produces quality that meets modern educational standards.

Malawi has been implementing an outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum in the secondary school sector since 2015. By design, the OBE curriculum follows a learner-centered approach, which means that the approach to implementation considers a student to be greatly valuable. Therefore, due to its nature, student-centered pedagogies complement the implementation of this OBE curriculum.

SDG 4 (Quality Education) is Malawi's primary focus when following the SDGs because the country aims to provide total access to quality education and permanent learning possibilities for all citizens. The national development plans of Malawi incorporate these goals through Malawi 2063 as the country works toward establishing a prosperous, inclusive nation by 2063. The main objective of this vision focuses on producing educational outcomes by implementing modern curricula while adopting efficient teaching methods and student-focused teaching approaches. Educational access growth in Malawi has proven successful, but the country encounters significant challenges when implementing student-centered teaching methods. School teachers who just started working find it challenging to use student-centered approaches because they need more training and assistance to implement these methods appropriately (Mtika en Gates, 2010; Chiphiko en Shawa, 2014).

Problem Statement

Existing educational research about Malawi has extensively studied educational issues but does not provide sufficient information regarding the obstacles to implementing secondary school pedagogical methods. Research data about teacher implementation barriers fills this knowledge gap through the current study. The study presents vital importance for Malawi's educational objectives as it examines barriers that stop teachers from adopting effective teaching practices needed for SDG implementation and the country's 2063 development plan. It offers an opportunity for curriculum implementers, policymakers, and curriculum designers to reflect on whether the practice has complemented theory and to decide the best way to achieve the goals envisioned through the designated strategies. The research presents practical solutions to help future development initiatives that will enhance educational access and learning quality in Malawi's secondary institutions, thus supporting the country's 2063 national development vision.

Rationale for conducting this study

A study analyses what stops learner-centered education from being used in newly constructed or expanded Malawian secondary schools that recruit teachers. Significant investments in school development and teacher recruitment have failed to produce satisfactory research proving their

impact on teaching quality as student-centered approaches are implemented. The research studied teachers' obstacles during method implementation by evaluating classroom size, limitations, resource scarcity, insufficient professional development opportunities, and reluctance to change teaching methods. The research findings offer essential insights into the obstacles to education quality in Malawi because the SDGs and Malawi 2063 require their resolution.

Therefore, the study highlighted key barriers that hinder the widespread adoption of learner-centered teaching practices and examined the difficulties encountered by novice teaching staff. It also discussed how obstacles affect teachers when implementing student-centered instruction at the classroom level. The effects of pedagogical shifts are analyzed by examining how teacher training programs and infrastructural development influence the process by identifying their supportive or blocking actions. Hopefully, this study creates policy recommendations alongside educational solutions that enhance teacher training programs and offer practical teaching methods to schools. Furthermore, this study fills the gap in detailed research about learner-centered teaching barriers that affect Malawi's rapidly expanding secondary education system.

Literature Review

Student-centered learning faces numerous complex implementation obstacles in developing nations (Queiros en de Villiers, 2016; Alam, 2023; Ali *et al.*, 2023; Banda *et al.*, 2024). Multiple academic studies of student-centered learning indicate that teachers encounter obstacles in complete implementation due to resource limitations (Alam, 2023), cultural resistance (Samarakoon en others, 2013; Abdigapbarova en Zhiyenbayeva, 2022), high student enrolment (Bohg *et al.*, 2017), and institutional learning requirements (Schweisfurth, 2013). Research suggests that strategic changes combined with specialized methods can eliminate barriers that stop student-centered learning (SCL) implementation despite their presence.

Teacher-centred methodologies are the primary factor hindering the adoption of SCL. Studies have proven that teachers continuously employ teacher-centered methods in lessons, even though they claim to use SCL. According to Mwadzaangati, Adler en Kazima (2022), secondary school geometry teachers in Malawi present facts to students rather than employing active discovery or problem-solving activities. The teacher-driven teaching method, simple thinking exercises, and minimal student independence suppress critical thinking and active learning.

A shortage of teachers and inadequate infrastructure have also contributed to crowded classrooms (UNESCO, 2023). According to Chiphiko en Shawa (2014), massive student populations in Malawi classrooms prevent teachers from implementing student-centered educational practices. A lack of professional development opportunities worsens traditional teaching methods since teachers require these opportunities to develop their skills from knowledge delivery to facilitation (Attard *et al.*, 2010).

Teachers who want to use SCL face extra implementation difficulties because their institutions lack sufficient resources and support. The high expenses of the student-centered approach implementation stem from essential elements of professional development for teachers, curriculum transformation, and proper resource distribution (Harris *et al.*, 2013). Mwadzaangati, Adler en Kazima (2022) and Chiphiko en Shawa (2014) reveal that many educational institutions in resource-deprived areas lack essential learning materials and technological infrastructure for active learning. Teachers'

instructional methods in their current working conditions fail to activate student participation. Malawi's typical crowded classroom environment hinders learner-focused teaching methods because it limits direct student instruction.

Educational organizations encounter difficulties adopting SCL teaching methods because traditional authority structures between teachers and students create significant obstacles in school settings. SCL faces difficulties in global propagation because Schweisfurth (2011) confirms it clashes with established cultural norms that assign teachers as the primary source of school knowledge. The cultural value disparity leads teachers and students to oppose SCL since it challenges established hierarchical teaching systems that the approach rejects. In Malawi, trainee teachers find it challenging to adopt learner-centered methods due to the prevailing teacher-centered practices in their schools, as noted by Mtika en Gates (2010). The traditional expectation for teachers to hold authority in classrooms creates additional obstacles for student-led learning implementation because social norms expect teachers to maintain their authoritative position.

SCL deployment success depends on assessment systems aligning completely with student-directed teaching goals. For instance, many developing nations have assessment frameworks that support rote memorization and standardized testing methods, while SCL promotes critical thinking and problem-solving approaches (Schweisfurth, 2019). Teachers in Malawi follow an examination-focused curriculum structure, leading them to focus on syllabus completion instead of student-led teaching methods based on research by Mtika en Gates (2010). Fact-based assessment methods pose a significant barrier to the implementation of SCL, as they hinder students from demonstrating their problem-solving abilities or profound conceptual understanding.

One crucial aspect that a teacher needs to consider in the SCL classroom is sharing power with the learners. The 21st-century skills that are purportedly gained through the use of SCL methods require the involvement of learners more than when using teacher-centered methods. Literature has also demonstrated that teacher resistance to surrendering their authority position is a key barrier to SCL's widespread acceptance (McKean, 2014). Student-centered learning requires a shift in classroom authority to create an environment that allows learners to take ownership of their education. Without power-sharing between the teacher and learners, students are challenged to be free to talk and collaborate, hence retaining a teacher-centered environment. Research indicates that student-centered environments face difficulties for educators and learners because students do not grasp the extent of autonomy expected in these classrooms. Staff teaching faces multiple barriers during SCL implementation because it demands an increased workload and continuous professional development. SCL achieves its goals when teachers transform into facilitators who used to act as dispensers of knowledge (Attard *et al.*, 2010). Developing nations experience difficulties implementing student-directed teaching approaches because their educators need better training and more substantial support to adopt this educational methodology (Schweisfurth, 2013).

Numerous evidence-backed techniques are available to remove obstacles hindering SCL implementation success. Attard et al. (2010) suggest that schools establish SCL by developing teacher training initiatives, curriculum changes, and institutional system development. Teachers who work with few resources can establish participatory classrooms by effectively using their resources and adapting their methods to meet local education requirements. Similarly, Mtika and Gates (2010) advocate for "indigenizing" SCL to make it more culturally relevant and contextually appropriate. Student-focused educational approaches can become functional and suitable for academic institutions

facing significant implementation challenges.

Educational environments experience various opportunities and multiple risks when technology is introduced for educational purposes. AI tool ChatGPT offers benefits that include student engagement and personalized educational content delivery, according to Birenbaum (2023). However, when misused, educational technologies can potentially destroy a deep understanding of core learning principles. Implementing educational technology requires a careful strategy to serve the primary educational goals. Berg en others 2023) explain how students struggle because they lack sufficient training for independent study. The ability of students to succeed in self-directed learning requires that they possess adequate basic skills for independent classroom work.

Implementing student-focused education in STEM subjects creates significant challenges for nations developing their education systems. The research by Aslam en others (2023) shows that STEM subjects encounter three significant obstacles: classroom management difficulties, limited resources for curriculum development, and inadequate educational materials. The implementation of student-centered methods by teachers resulted in enhanced teaching outcomes while simultaneously fostering their pedagogical knowledge development, according to Woods & Copur-Gencturk (2023). Student-centered teaching methods in sub-Saharan Africa fail to produce results because of limited budgets, insufficient resources, and unprepared teachers (Zickafoose en others, 2024).

Large student enrolment continues to be a widespread problem in developing countries worldwide. According to Pianta en Hofkens (2023), big classroom sizes prevent essential student-teacher interactions, enabling student growth in student-centered learning environments. Research by Basitere en others (2023) demonstrates that flipped classrooms succeed as an innovative educational approach for South African institutions because they enhance student interaction during their learning process. The solution needs massive financial backing to construct facilities, train educators, and create educational materials (Kibirige, 2023). However, it is important to note that innovative pedagogies and technology integration can help overcome some of these challenges, even in larger classes (Zhang, Lai en Xu, 2020). The key lies in finding the right balance between student-centered activities and instructor guidance, regardless of class size.

Students who lack preparation and engagement pose challenges to implementing student-focused teaching methods. According to Badshah en others, 2023), the teaching approach loses effectiveness because unstandardized procedures combined with absent parental participation and unclear assessment methods work against these methods. It was demonstrated that educational approaches that position students at the center create an increased mental workload for students who have not adequately prepared for their coursework. Innovative technologies demonstrate their ability to solve these issues through better student attendance and academic achievements (Badshah et al., 2023).

Developing nations must address four essential challenges to successfully implement student-centered teaching: large student enrolment numbers, insufficient resources and tools, outdated teacher instructional approaches, and inadequate education programs for instructors. Three primary strategies enable developing countries to create successful learning-based classrooms: professional development training, new infrastructure, and innovative technology integration in their educational systems.

It is understood that many challenges rock individual teachers, schools, and the entire education system, limiting teachers from using SCL in their classrooms, and Malawi is not spared. It is behind this

background that this study has been initiated to explore why secondary school teachers in Malawi struggle to effectively implement student-centered pedagogies despite it being an expectation set by government policy.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design implemented semi-structured in-depth interviews throughout different sections to determine the barriers that hinder learner-centred teaching methods. The research utilized random sampling to select 23 teachers and teacher-educators who worked at various educational institutions in Malawi to obtain diverse viewpoints. Among these teachers, some doubled as school administrators, giving a double perspective to the study. Two policymakers were also interviewed to get their perspective on the use of the student-centred learning approaches by teachers in public schools.

Studies like Lobst *et al.* (2023) and Darwish *et al.* (2023) faced the main challenge of establishing causality alongside time-based change monitoring since they measured situations at specific points in time. The research team focused on uncovering detailed information about existing obstacles to avoid forming inaccurate cause-effect relationships. It becomes challenging to ensure representativeness in research studies targeting specific population groups (Lobst et al., 2023; Darwish et al., 2023). Our project used random sampling to acquire professional teaching opinions from various Malawian schools, but it is acknowledged that the sample used did not represent the entire teaching population.

The study addresses language differences, participant fatigue, and cultural sensitivity through appropriate questions for different cultures, scheduled breaks for participants, and establishing strong relationships between researchers and participants. To overcome the limitations of a cross-sectional design, the researchers gathered information regarding existing barriers at that particular moment. Collecting valid data was possible through the implemented assessment techniques despite encountering natural research difficulties.

Research instrument

The interview instruments (Appendix A) were designed to explore key barriers to implementing student-centred pedagogy (SCP) in Malawian secondary schools, focusing on systemic barriers (resources, class sizes, institutional support), cultural resistance (student/parent expectations, societal norms), misalignment with assessment systems (exam pressures, curriculum constraints), teacher resistance (workload, lack of training), technological and student preparedness challenges, curriculum and time constraints, and lack of collaboration and institutional support. General reflections and recommendations were also incorporated to capture holistic insights.

The researchers developed the instruments using an extensive literature review and study objectives. It underwent face and content validation by two independent expert reviewers with expertise in educational pedagogy and qualitative research. Following validation, the instrument was piloted with a sample of teachers from a similar demographic to assess clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. Feedback from the pilot phase and expert reviewers was used to refine the instrument, ensuring alignment with the study's aims and cultural context. The final version was deployed for data collection, maintaining a balance between depth and brevity to facilitate comprehensive yet efficient

responses.

Data collection

During the pilot research period, the investigators refined the interview questionnaire to match the study requirements while making it easier to understand. The research assistants who underwent training performed interviews that lasted approximately 46 minutes each. The researchers established the sample size by reaching data saturation.

Data quality suffers from three principal obstacles in semi-structured interviews: language barriers, communication challenges, participant exhaustion, and cultural sensitivity standards. The research carried out by Davison *et al.* (2023) regarding refugees in Australia, along with Alasmari (2023), who studied Saudi Arabian international students, illustrated these problems. The research team resolved these problems through question development, combining cultural understanding with absolute clarity while providing enough time for respondents to speak freely. The study used interview methods (Panthalookaran, 2017) that involved scheduling restricted sessions and providing breaks for nurse preceptors working with participants in Qatar. Mwangala *et al.*, 2023) studied older adults living with HIV in Kenya to maintain trust and open communication during interviews through their development of participant rapport in sensitive areas such as stigma. Each respondent was, with informed consent, requested to share their WhatsApp or alternative online platforms for follow-up activities (with 2 opting not to share).

The present study was conceived in January 2024. Due to challenges in scheduling and synchronization of time, data collection took a relatively longer time. Data was collected from March 6, 2024, until June 13, 2024. Transcription was done from June 17 until August 28. From September 6, 2024, to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data, member checking was conducted by sharing interview transcripts with participants for verification. Participants were invited to review their responses and provide feedback on whether the transcribed data accurately reflected their views. This process allowed for corrections, clarifications, and additional insights, ensuring that the final analysis remained faithful to the participants' perspectives.

Data analysis

Information collection methods and analytical procedures must have uniform practices when using these two research approaches. The study employed methods from Quebu, Murray en Okafor (2023) that involved complete interviewer training and audio recording consent from participants to achieve precise data collection. According to Gharibi *et al.* (2023), the researchers utilized Atlas. ti software for thematic analysis under regular reliability checks.

Findings

The practice of teacher-led instruction is one of the main issues affecting education today. All interviewed teachers reported struggles with adopting student-directed instruction because managing big classes and insufficient resources proved significant obstacles. The data reveals that teachers mostly use lectures and direct instruction since these methods help them efficiently deliver necessary content within short periods.

One teacher stated, "I still lean heavily on teacher-centred methods... it is difficult to transition fully

when class sizes are so large. Group work becomes unmanageable" (Teacher 9). The need to teach material competently creates a challenge for instructors who must balance effective information transfer against student involvement because lectures restrict student independence and analytical thinking. Many teachers were unprepared to perform traditional knowledge-transmission duties while transitioning to facilitation-based roles. A teacher mentioned that "CPD sessions trained staff mainly about classroom management and subject expertise rather than showing them how to implement student-centred teaching approaches" (Teacher 1).

Systemic Barriers

The successful implementation of student-centred pedagogy faced multiple barriers that teachers identified within their educational system. Schools encounter significant resource limitations because they lack basic educational materials, together with necessary technology equipment and fundamental infrastructure. One teacher said, "Our school lacks enough textbooks alongside the absence of technological resources." The absence of these materials creates obstacles for teachers who want to support group learning and student-directed activities (Teacher 11). The insufficient infrastructure in schools serves as an additional barrier because it prevents the implementation of hands-on interactive learning through basic facilities such as science labs and computers.

Large classroom sizes represent another major system-wide challenge. Teachers emphasize that classrooms with more than 80 students create substantial difficulties when organizing group work, developing meaningful student interactions, and providing personal student assistance. Teacher 12 explained the challenge of managing 100 students by stating, "It becomes impossible to create small groups or properly check student progress" (Teacher 12).

Insufficient professional development emerged alongside large class sizes as barriers to successful implementation. The available CPD programs did not meet teachers' expectations because they lacked direct, practical examples of learner-centred teaching approaches. Educational staff members expressed dissatisfaction with their training because it lacked substance to help them address particular difficulties when using student-led approaches in classrooms with extensive student populations and limited resources. A teacher stated, "Most of the professional development has been on classroom management and subject-specific content, not on teaching methods" (Teacher 13).

Policymakers and administrators confirmed that these challenges stem from the rapid expansion of secondary education without adequate investments to recruit teachers and build necessary facilities. The policy to enhance education access has succeeded in raising student enrolment but failed to correspond with adequate school facility expansion and teacher recruitment. The administrator expressed that the system faces a dual challenge between ensuring universal education access and dealing with scarce resources. The growth of classroom student populations exceeds the capacity of existing school facilities, which hinders teachers from using interactive educational approaches. Policymakers scrutinized the current professional development programs because they dedicated most of their training to classroom management and subject knowledge instead of teaching methods. The policymakers advocated for changes in teacher training curricula, including SCP principles, practical teaching approaches, and mentorship programs to assist teachers in transitioning to student-centred instruction.

Cultural Resistance

Traditional educational customs were a significant barrier to teachers accepting student-centred learning methods. Students and teachers naturally resist giving up their traditional roles as authority figures because they believe teachers should maintain complete control in the classroom. Students maintain a traditional habit of expecting instructors to lead their learning because they grew accustomed to teacher-led instruction over student-led responsibility. One teacher noted, "Students are used to passively receiving information... shifting to a model where they take more responsibility for their learning can be difficult" (Teacher 15).

Cultural norms about teacher authority interfere with student-led learning, which requires self-directed participation from students. A teacher commented that his students show reluctance toward leading discussions or challenging the information provided by the instructor. According to Teacher 12, the cultural standard is challenging to overcome. Society's attitudes toward student conduct reinforce the expectation that listenership demonstrates proper respect instead of allowing students to engage in classroom discussions or ask questions about the materials. Most teachers show interest in adopting student-centred instruction yet face substantial opposition to modifying their methods because they believe it will expand their work demands. Teachers face challenges when adopting student-centred strategies because these methods demand additional time and effort, especially when working with large student groups. One teacher mentioned, "It takes much more time to guide students through activities... sometimes it is just easier to lecture and move on" (Teacher 13). The extended workloads required to shift teaching approaches repeatedly create additional obstacles for teachers to accept student-focused learning approaches.

Administrators and policymakers recognized how cultural norms affect educational practices while understanding how social expectations typically support teacher-dominated instruction. The speakers maintained that changing these entrenched social conventions requires sustained engagement between students, teachers, parents, and the broader social community. The policymaker stated that cultural resistance is a significant obstacle against student-centred teaching methods. Many parents and communities maintain a traditional education perspective because they believe teachers should transmit knowledge to students who only absorb information without interaction. Cultural transformation needs to begin with awareness and then be followed by dialogue to change this way of thinking. Policymakers introduced community outreach programs that combined workshops and awareness initiatives to teach parents and community members about SCP advantages and student independent learning needs. Local cultural values should be incorporated into teacher training programs to help educators apply the SCP principles in ways that will connect with the Malawian community.

Misalignment with Assessment Systems

A significant problem exists between the national assessment methods and student-centred educational targets. The testing process emphasizes memorization of facts for exams, forcing instructors to choose between delivering information and fostering student inquiry. A teacher explained, "The exams focus on memorization... this makes it hard to spend time on student-centred activities" (Teacher 9). Excessive content in the curriculum and its examination focus prevent space for critical thinking and problem-solving methods, which student-centred approaches would utilize. The mismatch between assessment approaches prevents schools from ultimately adopting learner-

centred teaching methods.

Policymakers and administrators acknowledged the disconnect between national assessments and the principles of SCP because the existing examination system favors memorization instead of critical thinking and problem-solving. Apply SCP: Teachers remain motivated to deliver content knowledge instead of advancing student learning since policymakers highlight this misalignment issue. A policy decision-maker admitted that our current assessment system fails to measure the competencies that students should learn. Our education policies must experience a fundamental change for us to adopt assessments that value critical thinking together with problem-solving abilities. The assessment system required policy amendments to introduce open-ended questions, project-based assessments, and continuous evaluation methods that follow SCP principles. Policymakers proposed minimizing content in the curriculum because it would free additional opportunities for student-directed classes and investigative learning approaches.

Lack of Technological Integration

The absence of technological tools from classroom instruction creates a significant challenge for teachers. Educators experienced dissatisfaction because their classrooms lacked appropriate technology tools to help students interact and work together. One teacher stated, "We do not have access to projectors or computers... this limits the kinds of interactive lessons we can deliver" (Teacher 10). The absence of essential tools prevents teachers from delivering student-centred educational activities based on virtual labs and multimedia presentations.

The policymakers and administrators stressed the importance of technological integration because limited computer and projector access and restricted internet connectivity prevent schools from implementing interactive teaching methods based on student-centred pedagogy. The authors suggested funding specific digital education initiatives to create technology-capable teachers and digitally literate students to support SCP implementation. The researchers stressed that students need proper preparation for self-directed learning because numerous students lack essential skills for independent or group assignments. The authors suggest establishing preparatory programs that will boost student confidence and capability in working with SCP environments.

Cognitive Load and Student Preparedness

The challenge of unpreparedness in self-directed learning presented itself among students. Teachers observed that students from lower-performing backgrounds and lower self-confidence make participating in student-led educational activities hard. One teacher noted, "Some students struggle with independent learning because they lack the foundational skills" (Teacher 3). The learning burden becomes too heavy for students who lack experience with self-learning responsibilities, thereby causing them to become uninterested and withdrawn.

Curriculum and Time Constraints

The need to teach comprehensive material and train students for exams reduces the time teachers can dedicate to student-led educational activities. Teachers expressed their sense of constraint because they must deliver content material rather than conduct inquiry-based learning with students. The educator explained, "We face constant pressure to finish all syllabus content, so there remains no opportunity for student-led classroom activities" (Teacher 14). Teachers face a dual challenge due to

their administrative workload, which reduces the time for collaborative lesson-planning sessions and professional development activities.

Current policymakers and administrative leaders identified the limitations within existing curriculum designs because these approaches confine teachers to teach the syllabus strictly while prioritizing examination results, which hinders authentic SCP implementation. The policymakers noted that the curriculum focuses primarily on content delivery, which restricts teacher autonomy in using student-driven teaching approaches. One policymaker stated, "The curriculum is designed to ensure that students are prepared for national examinations, but this focus on content coverage often comes at the expense of deeper learning and student engagement." The policymakers introduced changes to the curriculum, which included lowering content requirements and introducing additional opportunities for students to work on projects and conduct inquiries. National examinations should transition toward critical thinking-based and problem-solving scoring rather than traditional memorization methods according to their plan. Policymakers approved strategies to optimize administrative routines so teachers could use previously occupied time to conduct professional development and collaborative planning activities.

The dual responsibility of teaching entire curriculum content and test preparation creates significant barriers for teachers, limiting their capacity to conduct student-active learning activities. The educational demands for curriculum coverage collide with the Student-Centred approach goals, which forces teachers to use teacher-centred instruction methods to fulfil these requirements. Public officials and school administrators understand the necessity of revising education standards and assessment protocols to provide teachers with more teaching independence. A systemic change in curriculum and assessment practices based on SCP principles will deliver adequate teacher support to create meaningful learning environments for students.

Lack of Alignment between Teacher Education and Pedagogical Practice

There is a need to strengthen initial teacher training with the novel SCL strategies implemented in schools. There is some kind of gap between the teachers' training programs' curriculum and what teachers are expected to teach in their classrooms concerning instructional methods. Though this observation could be ascribed to teacher training as dominantly theoretical to learner-centred pedagogy and lacking sufficient practical tools, research tells that teachers teach how they were taught Oleson en Hora (2013), mainly being novices. The training received by teachers failed to match classroom realities, mainly when operating under limited resource conditions. The educational program left teachers unprepared to handle the challenges of working with big classrooms that lacked sufficient resources (Teacher 2).

Barriers to Teacher Collaboration and Institutional Support

A significant barrier to teacher collaboration emerged from lacking institutional backing for professional networking among teachers. The teachers expressed disappointment about the lack of official programs that motivate educators to unite and develop their pedagogical methods. The teacher mentioned that there exists no specific policy to promote teacher collaboration. School staff members lack time to exchange educational strategies and methods (Teacher 4). School institutions fail to support teacher collaboration, hindering teachers from sharing knowledge and creating new solutions to teach student-centred classes.

The motivational factors that drive teacher collaboration are internal and external elements, which SDT and SCT explain. External support systems strengthen the ability of teachers to establish productive collaboration while working independently. SDT demonstrates that teachers who feel competent, autonomous, and connected to their peers will build intrinsic motivation. Institutional backing proves essential for teachers to acquire essential collaborative tools and organizational structure while maintaining motivation for enduring collaboration.

The school must serve as a key element within SCT to develop a collaborative culture through dedicated time, resources, and supportive feedback for collaborative practices. The Organizational Culture theory shows that educational institutions need to lead the development of environments that support collective effectiveness combined with defined requirements and continuous knowledge exchanges. The sustainable implementation of meaningful teacher collaboration depends heavily on institutional backing, even though teachers can work together independently. The active support of schools through policies and structures should aim to develop this collaboration.

Policymakers and administrators emphasized that community involvement should address cultural norms that support teacher-led instruction. The policymakers recommended public education initiatives that would teach SCP advantages to all stakeholders to build widespread knowledge about its power for developing analytical thinking abilities and problem-solving competencies. The implementation of teacher collaboration and institutional support was identified as essential by these stakeholders because informal best practice-sharing systems hamper teaching innovation. The experts recommended creating formal professional learning communities to facilitate teacher cooperation for SCP implementation strategies and idea exchange.

According to policymakers, long-term systemic reforms emerged as a vital requirement for maintaining sustainable education quality improvements. The experts supported curriculum changes to decrease subject matter, adding project-based learning components and national examination modifications that reflect SCP goals. The policymakers demanded increased transparency alongside accountability in resource distribution to guarantee the effective use of funds that will resolve systemic obstacles. The experts declared that these proposals form the foundation for the widespread implementation of SCP in Malawian secondary schools.

Discussion

This study uncovers various complex obstacles that prevent student-centred learning (SCL) implementation in Malawian secondary schools and correspond to common difficulties in developing nations. The obstacles limit SCL implementation through teacher-centred approaches, broken educational structures, and resistance to new educational ideas, combined with systemic limitations and cultural resistance factors. This research studies these results using existing scholarship on SCL implementation.

Teacher-Centred Practices and Teacher Preparation

Teacher-centred instructional practices strongly resist adopting student-centred approaches throughout Malawian educational settings. Research evidence shows that instructors depend on traditional direct instruction and lecturing methods even though learner-focused educational practices

receive growing policy promotion. The study by Mwadzaangati, Adler en Kazima (2022) discovered that Malawian secondary school teachers still use fact-based instruction, which blocks active student participation in problem-solving activities. Teacher-centric delivery minimizes critical exploration and the freedom to make independent decisions, representing the fundamentals of student-led instruction.

The practice of educators using traditional teaching methods worsens because of insufficient teaching preparation. Most teachers admitted they lacked the skills to switch from delivering knowledge to facilitating student learning, underpinning student-centred education methods. The research conducted by Attard et al. (2010) shows that teacher development initiatives centred on the subject matter and classroom control systems fail to help educators transition into new instructional methods. The potential for Malawian teachers to excel in implementing constructivist teaching methods remains high, as this study has noted that most teachers have a positive attitude. Intensifying customized in-service pieces of training to develop their capacity in preparation for SCL approaches could help shape the situation. It was observed that continuous coaching and mentoring teachers to implement SCL approaches changed teachers' roles in implementing student-centred pedagogies.

Systemic Barriers: Resources, Class Sizes, and Institutional Support

The practical execution of SCL faces challenges because of the systemic barriers of insufficient resources and significant classroom populations identified in this study. The research reveals that insufficient educational resources limit teachers from implementing interactive teaching methods because they lack the required textbooks, classroom technology, and materials. Chiphiko en Shawa (2014) shares this observation by showing how overcrowded classrooms in Malawi restrict teachers from delivering personalized student engagement, which is essential to SCL.

Insufficient institutional support in Malawi's secondary schools directly stifles the implementation of student-centred approaches by creating systemic barriers that teachers cannot overcome independently. Harris et al. (2013) argue that transitioning to student-centred learning requires resources and institutional backing for comprehensive curriculum reform and ongoing teacher professional development. Without such support, teachers are left with outdated, teacher-centred methods that are familiar and simpler to apply in resource-constrained settings. This results in a disconnect between pedagogical intentions and classroom realities, where the complexities of student-centred approaches are impractical without the necessary institutional infrastructure.

Moreover, the lack of institutional support intensifies the challenges posed by overcrowded classrooms. In large classes, the ability to engage students individually is severely limited, making student-centred learning methods—such as differentiated instruction or active participation—challenging to implement. Teachers resort to more efficient, traditional methods requiring less individual engagement with no institutional mechanisms to support smaller class sizes or provide specialized resources. This systemic failure to support teachers with the tools, training, and reform needed for student-centred learning perpetuates a cycle of inefficiency and underachievement, ultimately limiting the potential for educational transformation in Malawi's secondary schools.

Cultural Resistance and Societal Norms

The study revealed cultural resistance as one of its key findings regarding SCL. The traditional cultural norms of Malawian classrooms and those of other developing nations enforce teacher authority while

requiring students to maintain passive knowledge reception. According to Schweisfurth (2019), the traditional educational framework of certain societies creates opposition toward SCL principles because these principles clash with established cultural values. The traditional requirement that students merely receive teacher knowledge makes it challenging for classrooms to transition toward student-directed instruction.

Many teachers experience students' expectations that they should provide instructions instead of implementing independent or collaborative learning approaches. According to Mtika and Gates (2010), teacher authority remains a central element of Malawian education, thus creating substantial obstacles to adopting student-centred classrooms. The widespread social resistance against power dynamics transformation between teachers and students creates challenges for students and teachers who need to accept SCL's self-directed approach and accountability.

This study recommends a phased approach to transforming classroom dynamics to address the challenge of student resistance to SCL in Malawi, particularly regarding the expectation that teachers provide instructions rather than facilitate independent or collaborative learning. As Mtika and Gates (2010) highlight, teacher authority is deeply entrenched in Malawian education, creating a significant barrier to adopting SCL. This study proposes that a gradual shift in the teacher's role—from an authoritative figure to a facilitator of learning—should be implemented. To support this shift, professional development programs should be introduced to equip teachers with the necessary pedagogical tools to foster collaboration, self-directed learning, and accountability within the classroom.

Furthermore, integrating local cultural and contextual factors into teacher training is crucial. This ensures that both teachers and students are not only familiar with the principles of SCL but can also adapt them to their educational environment. Additionally, schools can engage in community outreach to address social resistance, helping students and parents understand the value of SCL in promoting critical thinking and lifelong learning. By redefining the teacher-student power dynamics and providing continuous support, this approach will make the transition to student-centred learning pedagogically and culturally feasible.

Misalignment with Assessment Systems and Curriculum Pressures

The study identified a significant barrier from the misfit between national assessment criteria and teaching methods, which put students at the center. Teachers experience overwhelming pressure to teach students for standardized exams that focus on memorized facts rather than critical thinking skills, which SCL promotes.

According to Mtika and Gates (2010), the education curriculum tends to be heavy in content while prioritizing examinations. The emphasis on syllabus achievement blocks opportunities for students to participate in inquiry-driven studies that drive student-focused instruction. Teaching staff must deliver their material first to prepare students for upcoming tests, thus blocking additional learning opportunities or allowing detailed studies of interesting subjects.

Teacher Resistance to Change and Increased Workload

The research showed that teachers' opposition to educational transformation expands when they face additional work responsibilities from adopting student-focused teaching approaches. Student-centred

teaching methods, which replace traditional lectures, require substantial commitment because they affect classrooms with many students and limited educational resources. It demonstrates that teachers face significant challenges when developing facilitative teaching skills because they require extensive work, while teachers must also maintain their current duties.

The unwillingness of teachers to give up their authoritative position along with student-centred approaches stems from insufficient training opportunities. Teachers working in resource-constrained environments often lack constructivist teaching methods because they receive insufficient training to move toward student-led learning environments. Insufficient preparation of teachers consolidates conventional learning methods, hindering their transition to modern educational approaches. Adopting learner-centred teaching methods proves challenging for teachers because it needs continuous professional development and institutional backing, according to Attard et al. (2010).

Technological Integration and Student Preparedness

As a significant obstacle to SCL implementation, the study discovered that schools operate without adequate technological integration. Teachers were discontent with insufficient technological access to computers and projectors that play a key role in interactive teaching methods. The research by Birenbaum (2023) explores AI tools like ChatGPT, but the study shows that Malawian schools lack the necessary infrastructure to utilize these tools effectively. Teachers face barriers when they lack proper educational technology because this prevents them from conducting interactive online activities, which serve as core elements in student-focused learning methods.

Furthermore, the study points to students' preparedness as another key issue. According to Badshah et al. (2023), most students lack fundamental abilities for self-directed learning, which creates obstacles to their complete participation in student-centred activities. Attendance at schools that lack sufficient preparation programs leads students to experience excessive mental strain during independent learning activities, thus hindering their success in student-led educational systems.

Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that teachers need specialized training in student-focused methods together with practical guidance and instruction for controlling classrooms with numerous students and such scarce materials. Schools must allocate funding for enhancing classroom facilities, including modern technology, an essential component of student-led teaching systems. National policymaking officials must restructure educational standards and assessment frameworks to adapt them for student-led instruction focusing on analytical reasoning and adaptive problem-solving instead of memorization tasks. Educators should receive training incorporating cultural awareness initiatives to establish a new teacher-student relationship where learning methods become more team-based and inclusive of student self-direction and participation.

Conclusion

This research shows that Malawian educators struggle greatly to use student-centred learning methods because of large class sizes, limited resources, and cultural obstacles they must overcome.

The obstacles teachers face in implementing student-centred education match the significant implementation challenges described in educational research about traditional teaching methods versus democratic learning formats. Several components need attention to break down these obstacles: teachers must receive appropriate training, additional funds are necessary for creating new learning materials, and the educational system must adopt contemporary student-centred approaches. Technological integration and student preparation must become priority elements to establish effective learner-centred classrooms in schools that operate within the resource limits of Malawi. Systemic and cultural barriers need to be resolved to establish a learning environment that supports student-centred methodology, which will equip students with 21st-century vital skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning abilities.

The study faces a significant restriction because it works with a small group of subjects, limiting its broader application. The research examines only a restricted number of teachers operating in a limited set of secondary schools in Malawi without effectively portraying the complete educational scenario in the country. A small research sample hinders the ability of researchers to apply study findings beyond Malawian educators and other developing countries facing comparable educational issues. The interpretation of results becomes affected because teachers from various regions, school types, and subject areas could experience different challenges that may reduce the overall applicability of findings to Malawi's teaching environment and similar contexts.

The data limitations in this study result from the fact that researchers obtained information from teachers through interview methods. Researchers depended heavily on teacher-reported practices and challenges, exposing the study to potential reporting biases, social desirability bias, and retrospective bias. Teachers might have described their student-centred teaching implementation difficulties as inaccurate or biased because they sought to align with educational reforms or because of recall accuracy problems. The interpretation of classroom student-centred method implementation effectiveness might be distorted by researcher bias, leading to either misleading optimistic or incorrect perceptions of the situation.

Research improvements should include increasing the study's sample size by including teachers from various geographical areas and education settings while using observational techniques. Expanding the study scope through this method would better understand student-centred learning obstacles and create a more detailed analysis of challenge manifestations across different educational contexts. Integrating qualitative and observational data would improve research findings by making them more useful for different educational contexts.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire guides

Questionnaire Guide for Teachers

1. Teacher-Centred Practices and Teacher Preparation

This section captures teachers' reliance on traditional methods, training experiences, and readiness (or lack thereof) to adopt SCP.

1. What teaching methods do you typically use in your classroom, and how did you learn to use them? Have you had any training or professional development that influenced your teaching style?
2. What are your thoughts on shifting from teacher-led instruction to more student-centred approaches? What challenges or opportunities do you see in making this shift, and how prepared do you feel to implement it?

2. Systemic Barriers (Resources, Class Sizes, and Institutional Support)

These questions address resource limitations, class size challenges, and the level of institutional support and collaboration, which are key systemic barriers identified in the study.

3. Can you describe the resources and facilities available in your classroom and school (e.g., textbooks, technology, science labs)? How do these resources, or the lack thereof, shape your teaching methods and your students' learning experiences?
4. How would you describe the size of your classes, and how does this affect your ability to engage with students and implement different teaching approaches?
5. What kind of support do you receive from your school or administration when it comes to trying new teaching methods? Are there opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share strategies, and if so, how does this collaboration influence your teaching practices?

3. Cultural Resistance and Societal Norms

These questions explore cultural resistance, societal expectations, and how these factors impact the adoption of SCP.

6. How do students, parents, and the community view the role of teachers and students in the classroom? Do you think these views align with student-centred teaching methods, and how do they influence your teaching?
7. Are there any cultural or societal factors that affect how teaching and learning are approached in your school or community? How do these factors play out in the classroom, particularly when trying to implement student-centred methods?

4. Misalignment with Assessment Systems and Curriculum Pressures

These questions address the misalignment between assessment systems, curriculum demands, and SCP goals.

8. How do national examinations and the curriculum influence your teaching practices? Do you feel pressured to focus on exam preparation, and how does this affect your ability to incorporate student-centred activities?
9. Do you feel the current curriculum allows enough flexibility for teachers to experiment with different teaching methods? If not, what changes would you suggest to better support student-centred learning?

5. Teacher Resistance to Change and Workload

These questions explore teachers' resistance to change, workload challenges, and their perceptions of the feasibility of SCP.

10. How do you feel about the amount of time and effort required to implement new teaching methods, such as student-centred approaches? What challenges or benefits do you see in this process, and how do you balance these demands with your other responsibilities?
11. What do you think are the main reasons some teachers might resist changing their teaching methods? Have you experienced any of these challenges yourself, and how did you address them?

6. Technological Integration and Student Preparedness

These questions address the lack of technological resources and students' readiness for SCP.

12. What kind of technology is available in your classroom, and how do you use it in your teaching? How do you think technology could support student-centred learning, and what challenges or limitations do you face in using it?
13. How do students respond to activities that require them to take more responsibility for their learning, such as independent or group work? What challenges do they face in these situations, and how do you address them?

7. Curriculum and Time Constraints

These questions explore how curriculum pressures and time constraints affect SCP implementation.

14. How do you manage the time required to cover the curriculum while also incorporating student-centred activities? Can you describe any strategies you use to balance these demands?
15. Do you feel that the current curriculum allows enough flexibility for teachers to experiment with different teaching methods? If not, what changes would you suggest to better support student-centred learning?

8. Teacher Collaboration and Institutional Support

These questions address the lack of collaboration and institutional support, as well as potential solutions.

16. Do you collaborate with other teachers to share ideas or resources? If so, how does this collaboration work, and how does it impact your teaching? What kind of support do you think teachers need from their schools or administration to successfully implement new teaching methods?
17. Are there any policies or programs at your school that encourage teachers to work together or try new approaches? If not, do you think such initiatives would be helpful, and what form should they take?

9. General Reflections and Recommendations

These questions allow teachers to reflect on the overall challenges and propose solutions, aligning with the study's recommendations.

18. What do you think are the biggest challenges to implementing student-centred teaching methods in Malawian secondary schools? Can you share any examples from your own experience?
19. What changes, if any, do you think would make it easier for teachers to adopt student-centred approaches in their classrooms? Are there any specific policies, resources, or training programs

you would recommend?

Questionnaire Guide for Policy Makers and School Administrators

Introduction

1. Role and Responsibility :

As a key stakeholder in the education system, how would you describe your role in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in Malawian secondary schools?

Section 1: Large Class Sizes

2. Addressing Class Size Challenges :

Large class sizes are a significant barrier to implementing student-centred pedagogy. As a policy maker/administrator, what specific strategies or policies do you believe should be prioritized to reduce class sizes and improve the learning environment?

3. Resource Allocation for Class Size Reduction :

Given the constraints in infrastructure and teacher recruitment, how can resources be more effectively allocated to address the issue of overcrowded classrooms? What role can policy makers and administrators play in this process?

Section 2: Under-Resourced Schools

4. Ensuring Effective Resource Distribution :

Despite increased expenditure in education, many schools remain under-resourced. What mechanisms or oversight processes can be implemented to ensure that resources reach schools more efficiently and equitably?

5. Prioritizing Critical Resources :

What steps can be taken to ensure that schools have access to essential resources such as textbooks, technology, and infrastructure, which are critical for implementing student-centred pedagogy?

6. Accountability in Spending :

How can transparency and accountability in education spending be improved to ensure that funds are used effectively to address resource gaps in schools?

Section 3: Systemic Barriers

7. Strengthening Institutional Support :

What institutional support systems need strengthening or establishing to help schools and teachers transition to student-centred pedagogy? How can policymakers and administrators facilitate this transition?

8. Teacher Training and Professional Development :

How can teacher training programs be redesigned or expanded to better prepare educators for student-centred teaching methods? What role should policymakers and administrators play in this process?

9. Reforming Assessment Systems :

National examinations often prioritize memorization over critical thinking. What reforms to the assessment system would you propose to better align it with the goals of student-centred pedagogy?

Section 4: Cultural and Societal Factors

10. Addressing Cultural Resistance :

Cultural and societal norms often reinforce teacher-centred practices. What strategies can policy makers and administrators employ to address this resistance and promote the adoption of student-centred pedagogy?

11. Engaging Communities :

How can schools and policy makers work more effectively with parents and communities to build support for student-centred teaching methods?

Section 5: General Reflections and Recommendations

12. Identifying Key Barriers :

From your perspective, what are the most significant systemic barriers to implementing student-centred pedagogy in Malawian secondary schools?

13. Policy and Administrative Solutions :

As a custodian of quality education, what specific policy changes or administrative actions would you prioritize to address these barriers and support the adoption of student-centred teaching methods?

14. Long-Term Vision for Education :

What long-term strategies should be implemented to ensure sustainable improvements in the quality of education and the successful implementation of student-centred pedagogy in Malawi?