

**EXPLORING THE USE OF DISCUSSION METHODS IN SOCIAL
STUDIES**

**M.Ed. (CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES-SOCIAL STUDIES
EDUCATION) THESIS**

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UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

MAY, 2018

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By

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DECLARATION

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

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my lovely daughters Mercy and Madalo who supported me when things were tough for me. They encouraged me although they felt deprived of motherly love in the course of this work. On the overall, thanks be to God who saw me through.

To my mother, Emily Chewere who on my first graduation answered my statement when I said “*ndapeza chomwe ndimafuna*” that “*sitimvanso kuti mwabwereranso ku sukulu inu?*” Indeed you were right. I did. Now this is another fruit for you.

To my late father, Loyd Hensly Maonga, who nurtured my sisters and I like his fellow policemen, he gave me the spirit of pushing on even when it seems impossible. I salute you. May your soul rest in eternal peace.

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to find out the use of discussion methods in Social Studies classrooms in Secondary Schools. This study was informed by the pedagogical reforms that took place in 1987. The shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred methods motivates teachers that they should change their practices. The learner-centred pedagogy is believed to influence learning because learners generate their own knowledge by questioning, discussing, analysing and synthesising content which is in tandem with the rationale “Social studies as citizenship education seeks to provide students with the skills which will enable them participate actively as citizens of a democracy”. The study involved four social studies teachers from four schools. It used the qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm. The study used classroom observation and interviews methods to generate data. The data was analysed using the interpretive paradigm. Not all the four Social studies teachers used discussion methods. There were reasons which led to this. There was lack of encouragement from the supervisors to help teachers know the importance of using discussion methods in teaching Social studies. The Social studies teachers needed to be informed that citizenship education is influential in blending learners into democracy from grassroots level. The study concluded that large classes and inadequate teaching and learning resources contributed to partial use of discussion methods to teach Social Studies. The implication was that Social Studies teachers used discussion methods to suit their own purposes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the introduction and background of the study, it also highlights the problem statement which this study seeks to address, the purpose of the study, research questions which guide the study. The significance of the study and definitions of key terms have also been presented.

1.2 Background to the research

This study is in the context of pedagogical reforms in Malawi. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is advocating for the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy underpinned by constructivist theories of learning. This represents a paradigm shift from the teacher-centred approaches that were prevalent in Malawian schools. To this effect, Ministry of Education reviewed the curriculum in 1987 and introduced Social studies in the primary schools and the junior secondary schools. In 2001, Social studies was introduced at secondary school starting in form one. Social studies was introduced in order to equip learners with citizenship skills that would enable them to face the social and economic realities since Malawi is part of the global community. ‘Social studies seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills, competences, positive attitudes and values which will enable the students to participate actively,

intelligibly, and responsibly in daily life activities as citizens of a democratic world. It also seeks to make students actively participate in social, political and economic development of the nation` (Malawi Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 1988, p.v). Dewey (1910) argues that the values of a democratic society and the patterns of human interaction needed to realise these values, can best be transmitted to the young through schooling that processes an adequate degree of continuity in experience between the society at large and the future of the learners' life in school. The means of education must be consistent with the ends. To maintain a democratic society, citizens should be able to think critically for themselves as well as being willing and able to freely exchange ideas and opinions with others. The use of discussion methods in Social studies since 1987 is meant to equip learners with citizenship skills like group life where tolerance and respect of each other's views are developed (MoEST, 2001). The use of such participatory approaches has changed the education philosophy in Malawi where the teacher now becomes the facilitator while the learners become active participants in their learning. Assessment of learners has also adopted the learners` continuous contribution towards their learning hence, continuous assessment.

Multiparty democracy brought with it the change in the way of life. Tabulawa (1998) commented that the dictatorship regimes slowly gave way to political systems based on the principle of western liberal participatory democracy. This fuelled the need for more participatory learning to nurture and protect the emerging democracies. The re-introduction of multiparty democracy in Malawi in

1993 led to the shift into preparing learners to become active citizens of the democratic society. Democracy brought controversial concepts like cultural identity, human rights, conflict resolution, gender and development and others (Wronski, n.d.). These issues need proper transmission to the learners so that they can understand the controversy surrounding them. Discussion methods can bring out such controversy through diverse learners' views. Discussion allows learners to freely explore concepts in their classrooms. This study aimed to understand the practices of Social studies teachers when using discussion methods.

1.3 Statement of the problem

A number of studies done in primary schools have revealed that use of participatory learning approaches faces a lot of challenges. For example, Mhango (2004), Chiziwa (2012) cite large classes, lack of teaching and learning aids and lack of enough time as some of the challenges these teachers face. In higher education, studies about participatory approaches were done by Mwala (2012) and Mombe (2015). The potential challenge for primary school teachers in Malawi is to adopt participatory learning methods against a curriculum which is prescriptive and time-based. The other challenge that these teachers face is to provide students with individual attention, regular assessment and active learner involvement while they are expected to finish the prescribed curriculum content within the specified time (Chiziwa, 2012). In higher education, there are studies about participatory approaches (Mwala, 2012) and cooperative learning (Mombe, 2015) in Social studies. No study has specifically tackled discussion methods in Social studies which this thesis seeks to address.

Discussion methods are among the teaching methods that are used in Social studies. Other methods include inquiry, expository, observation, interview, project methods, and learning through concept (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000). Discussion methods which are the centre of this study are used to stimulate learning through class discussions. This also helps students to become confident as they talk to others outside classroom situation (Gunter & Estes, 2003).

However, discussion methods are partially used as many teachers still prefer the banking method of teaching also referred to as chalk and talk (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000). This remains the case because teachers are not trained on how to correctly use them hence teachers' incompetence makes these methods ineffective. The banking method is oppressive (Freire, 2000) and does not tend to improve cognitive development (Glasby, 1985). It gives the learners no chance of contributing towards their learning and makes them aliens to their learning. Learners are treated like objects, containers, receptacles to a lesson and with nothing to contribute to the lessons; they just listen to the teacher who is the authority. Freire (2000) notes in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" that this method is meant to suppress thinking and the liberation of the minds. The banking method forces the learners to accept the situation as it is without questioning.

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, with each other (Freire, 2000; Furth, 1969; Archambault, 1974). Teachers need to know that discussion methods heighten knowledge. Apart from that,

Social studies teachers should know that the subject requires use of discussion methods so that the learners can attain citizenship skills for democracy (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995). Teachers need to frequently use discussion methods as one of the learning approaches to achieve citizenship skills like tolerance, respect, empathy, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The four sampled secondary school teachers were not trained on how to use participatory learning methods like discussion methods to teach Social studies. In addition, they also follow a curriculum which is prescriptive and time-based. This challenge is aggravated by lack of proper management of teacher professional development (Hango, 2005; Mizrach, Padilla & Banda, 2010). Based on such evidence, this study sought to understand the practices of secondary school teachers in the implementation of discussion methods in Social studies.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore how discussion methods are used in Social studies classrooms in some Malawi secondary schools.

1.5 Research questions

In line with the purpose of study, the main research question in this study was: How do teachers use discussion methods to promote learning in Social studies classrooms in Malawi secondary schools? Specifically, the study answered the following questions:

- i. What knowledge do teachers of Social studies have about discussion methods?
- ii. How do Social studies teachers use discussion methods in teaching?
- iii. What are the challenges that Social studies teachers face when using discussion methods to teach?
- iv. How do Social studies teachers deal with the challenges they face when using discussion methods?

1.6 Significance of study

This study is very important as it would fill the gap in the body of knowledge. It would add knowledge to upcoming scholars regarding the use of discussing methods in Social studies. They would realise that the use of discussion methods is not a luxury which schools may participate in after they have used other learning approaches (Wronski, n.d). It would equip learners with citizenship skills that would enable them to effectively participate in group life. This would mould learners to become rational decision makers, reflective thinkers and active participants in a democracy, therefore instil citizenship skills in the learners. The study would also sensitise teachers on the importance of discussion methods and how they improve the generation of knowledge by the learners. Teachers would also realise that discussion methods improve interactional skills. The knowledge may also be of significance to the curriculum developers.

1.7 Definitions of key terms

Participatory Learning: It is a system that engages students in the construction of products requiring practices that embody complex concepts, necessitate collaboration and contextualise learning within contexts in which problem solving and inquiry are fundamental aspects of the learning process. The goal from this perspective is to establish rich environments that encourage explanation and discovery, nurture reflection and support students in carrying out of practices that embody personally meaningful and practically functional representations (Barab, Gorha & Renger, 2008: p.48).

Social Studies: The Subject that includes Geography, History, Theology and History

Citizenship: It means to be able to participate in group life. Citizenship education empowers young children to sort out competing political viewpoints, resolve the contradictions between what they are taught and what they often witness in society, make critical assessments regarding the pressing social issues of the day, work in a multiparty and multicultural society and be prepared to behave responsibly as informed citizens in the political process (Long, 1975). Learners should be taught to develop into intelligent, responsible, and effective global citizens who are rational decision makers, reflective thinkers and active participants in a democracy.

Outcome Based Education (OBE). This is a type of teaching and learning where the learner has to show specific outcomes to show that he/she has attained the objective in the lesson (Acharya, 2003).

Stimulus-Response(S-R): This is a system of learning where a stimulus and a response form part of learning which is always followed by a reward. Originally experimented by Ian Pavlov a psychologist who experimented on rats where every desired behaviour received a reward. This led to memorising or rote learning which does not generate new knowledge (Pavlov, 1927).

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is presented in five chapters. Chapter one provides the background, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and the significance of study. Chapter two details the literature review on different forms of discussion methods with examples of other learner-centred methods. This chapter also discusses the use of discussion methods in relation to Social studies and finally provides the theoretical framework that guided the study. Chapter three outlines the methodology of the study and its justification. Chapter four presents the findings and discussions of the study. Finally, chapter five provides the conclusions and implications of the study.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has introduced the study on the use of discussion methods in Social studies in Malawi Secondary Schools. In this chapter, I have discussed the background of learner centred methods and their importance. I have also highlighted the disadvantages of teachers' authority over learners' learning while relating it to the democratic society. I have also discussed the contribution of this

study towards the improvement of education in Malawi. It has also presented definition of concepts or terms used in the thesis and organisation of the thesis. The next chapter provides literature review on discussion methods.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Chapter overview

This section presents literature on global trends in education as whole and global trends in Social studies education. It also dwells on discussion methods of teaching. Discussion includes the different types or forms of discussion that can be used in the classroom, their advantages and disadvantages. Cooperative learning as a learner centred approach is also discussed. A review of studies which have been carried out on discussion methods on which my study is based is made. The last section discusses social constructivism as a theoretical framework of this study.

2.2 Global trends in education

The period from around 1980 to the 1990s was characterised as an era of education reform and restructuring across Africa. This was fuelled by the political changes that influenced several governments to conform to that change (Jansen, 2007). Significant to these reforms was a shift from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred teaching approaches (Adeyemi, 2000). In teacher-centred approaches, the teacher assumes the role of an information giver whereas in learner-centred approaches, a teacher assumes the role of a facilitator in the teaching and learning process, and the learner is actively involved in the learning process (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Participatory approaches like discussion

methods are some of such reforms which represent a shift from teacher-centred to learner –centred approaches to teaching and learning.

2.3 Global and local trends in Social studies education

The proceedings of the 1968 Mombasa Conference gave birth to African Social and Environmental Studies Program (ASESP) and an African perception of Social studies (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000). Recommendations made at the conference prompted many countries including Malawi to restructure their education systems. Africa proposed the concept of Social studies as a new subject in its education system (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000). Till the 1980s, the Social Studies had the structure and content of the British education primary school syllabi which included Geography, History and Civics as the Social studies (MoEST, 1982). Sixty-eight percent of the content was about European Colonial era, Ancient and Medieval History covered twenty-five percent, while the remainder focused on independence till 1982 (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995). Up to the 1990s, the Malawi Social Studies still included many of the traditional western topics of western civilization courses, including Ancient Greece, Mesopotamia, and the European Renaissance which aimed at the glorification of the colonial authority and western culture (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000). Africanisation of the content occurred with the inclusion of John Chilembwe and Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda for their role in the independence movement. Landforms, climate and conservation were the major topics of focus covering Malawi and Africa. A large section of the 1982 syllabi was devoted to citizenship attitudes like obedience, loyalty, rights, duties and the

local government (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000) which were primarily intended for nation building and international understanding.

Between 1987 and 1991, Malawi Institute of Education reviewed and revised the Social studies syllabi for standards one to eight. It reconceptualised the primary school Social studies by integrating History, Geography, and Civics. There was also emphasis on the history of Malawi, its people and their development. The major shift in the 1991 syllabi gave considerable attention and focus on the behaviour of good citizens, emphasis on environment and conservation of natural resources (Kabwila & Tlou, 2000).

After the shift from one party to multiparty, the state curriculum was revised to accommodate democratic values. The rationale of the secondary school Social studies curriculum reads:

“Social studies as citizenship education seeks to provide students with the skills which will enable them participate actively as citizens of a democracy”.

The primary purpose of Social studies is:

To help young people of Malawi have a good understanding about important contemporary issues. This would enable the youth to make informed and rational decisions for public good and their own good so that they spearhead the development of Malawi as citizens of a culturally diverse democratic society and interdependent world.

(Malawi Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 1998, p.v).

Hence participatory approaches of teaching and learning like discussion have been integrated into the new syllabi. Alternative forms of assessment including the use of continuous assessment were also introduced. Teachers of Social studies in primary schools were given training in both content and methodology (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995). Secondary school Social studies teachers were not oriented on the same when Social studies was introduced in 2001.

2.4 Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is defined as any classroom learning approach in which students of all levels of performance work together in groups towards a common goal (Sharan & Shaulov, 1989). Students are assigned to small groups to learn material and are involved in negotiating, initiating, planning and evaluating together. They are given a responsibility of creating a “learning community” where all students participate in significant and meaningful ways. Students group together and accomplish significant tasks, and more than likely attain higher achievement levels (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy 1984; Maryland State Department of Education, 1990).

Cooperative learning is similar to traditional notions of group discussions because individuals engage in discussions to enhance understanding through verbalisation of their own ideas and response to the ideas of others (Dixson, 1994). The only difference exists in the aims of the activity. Halpern (1987) and Lindsay (1988) agree with Dixson (1994) by adding that knowing facts is just a start. Students need to know how to apply them, when to question them, and how to relate them

to other topics. Other scholars advocate debate, interviews, and presentations (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Heller & Hollabough, 1991).

2.5 Learner-centred approaches

The last twenty years have seen a dramatic shift in the conception of learning. The Stimulus-Response approach. With its analogy of the mechanical telephone exchange, has been replaced by theories which see the learner as an active processor of information. The new cognitive psychology has benefited from several sources, both empirical and conceptual (Atkins & Brown, 2002). Muraya and Kimano (2011) quoted the UNESCO-EFA Global Monitoring Report (2005, p. 33) which observed that practitioners broadly agree that teacher-dominated pedagogy where students are placed in a passive role is undesirable: where the learners do not process information”, yet such is the norm in the vast majority of classrooms in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report further notes that there is a consensus on the desirability of a participatory, interactive learner-centred, active pedagogy which is tenable in discussion. Svensson (1977) and Dahlgren (1978) have shown that an excessive number of factual questions and perhaps, an overwhelming curriculum appears to induce a surface approach. Svensson (1977) argues that a deep approach to studying is doubly important, for it affects the level of understanding reached and the number of hours of study. Habitual surface learners tend to achieve minimal understanding of content.

2.5.1 Types of Discussion methods

Walter and Scott (1996) define discussion as the effort of a group of individuals who communicate with each other using speaking, nonverbal, and listening processes in order to solve commonly recognised problems or to arrive at an understanding of values. In discussion, participants are active, not passive. Participants state their viewpoint, hear it criticised, defend the new view point, and may modify it. Students restructure their knowledge when engaged in discussion thereby affecting their learning positively. Examples of discussion methods include whole class, small group, panel, forum, debate, and symposium

Discussion methods and cooperative learning fall within learner centred methods. This is so because cooperative learning and discussion methods focus on group activities and sharing of knowledge. Cooperative learning like discussions promotes critical thinking because human interaction is required; students interact with material through discussion with peers and are able to view things from multiple perspectives (Dixson, 1994). The group members are provided with the opportunity to identify and remedy errors of individual judgment (Hirokawa, 1990).

Kochhar (1985) identifies two major types of discussions which are formal and informal. Informal discussions are governed by predetermined set of rules. They include debates, panels and symposia and are mainly controlled by the learners themselves with the teacher as a consolidator of the facts generated. Reynolds and

Muijs (2001) suggests that in a debate, discussions should be initiated by pairs of students on significant and controversial topics while panel discussions, open forums and symposia should be arranged as per nature of the study. Formal discussion is mainly controlled by the teacher who checks that all the procedures are followed.

Discussion methods promote cooperative learning in the development of students' social skills such as understanding and communication (Kochhar, 1985). Working with other students may help them to develop empathetic abilities, by promoting tolerance of diverse viewpoints on any single issue, which can help them to realise that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. They also develop communication skills such as listening carefully, responding emphatically, speaking persuasively and cooperating readily with others in a group (Stradling, 1984). Trying to find a solution to a problem in a group also assists them in developing skills such as the need to accommodate each other (Reynolds & Muijs, 2001). Consequently, individuals make observations, test hypotheses, and draw conclusions that are largely consistent with one another (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Hung, 2002). Students can also provide each other with scaffolding in the same way the teacher can, during questioning.

In addition, several students working on a problem together are less likely to lose track of important factors than individuals working alone. The total knowledge available in a group is likely to be larger than that available to individual students,

which can enable more powerful problem-solving and can therefore allow the teacher to give students more difficult problems than he or she could give to individual students (MoEST, 1996). Furthermore, Hay & Barab (2001); Paavola, Lipponen & Hakkarainen (2004); Utterback (1964) say that additions to, deletions from, or modifications of individual's knowledge come mainly from the sharing of multiple perspectives. Systematic, open-minded discussions and debates are instrumental in helping individuals create personal views (Schmidt, De Volder, De Grave, Jonst & Patel, 1989; Dixson, 1991). During discussions, children pick up and reuse effective argument stratagems they see other children using (Heller & Hollabough, 1991).

Discussion methods can create free-rider effects whereby certain members of the group do not effectively contribute and rely on the work of others (Reynolds & Muijs, 2001). It is also time consuming and can also be useless if not well organised (MoEST, 1996).

For discussion methods to be effective, one needs to take a number of elements into account in the structuring of the task. Before commencing the task, the goals of the activity need to be clearly stated and the activity needs to be explained in such a way that no ambiguity can exist over the desired outcomes of the task. The teacher needs to make clear that cooperation between students in the group is desired. According to Slavin (1987), these goals need to be group goals in order to facilitate cooperation, which needs to be accompanied by individual

accountability for work done in order to avoid free-rider effects. This can be achieved by making completion of one part dependent on the previous stage so that learners can pressure each other to complete the stage before. Some form of competition with other groups can help students work together, as can using a shared manipulative or a tool such as a computer.

Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggest a number of roles that can be assigned to students in the groups such as the summariser, the researcher, the checker, the runner, the trouble shooter or observer, and the recorder. Learners should be given individual grades (for the student's work in reaching the group goal) and collective grades (for the group as a whole). This is an effective strategy for ensuring both group goals and individual accountability (Slavin, 1987).

When the task is completed, the results need to be presented to the whole class and a debriefing session focusing on the process of the group discussion. A debriefing session starts by asking students what they thought has gone particularly well or badly during group work. The teacher can then give feedback on which elements he or she thought went well or less well, and ask students how the process could be improved.

McKeachie (2002) explains that, research in cognitive psychology has found that memory is affected by how deeply we process new knowledge. Discussion methods make learners to interact with content hence improving memory. Simply

listening to or repeating something is likely to store it in such a way that we have difficulty finding it when we want to remember it. If we elaborate our learning by thinking about its relationship to other things we know or by talking about it - explaining, summarising or questioning - we are most likely to remember it when we need to use it later. McKeachie's findings agree with the discussion method because as learners discuss content, they explain, summarise or question each other thereby creating effective memory. This also agrees with Farrant (1988: p.134) who argues using the Chinese adage which says 'I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand'. This implies that interacting with the learning material induces a deep understanding.

Discussion methods are effective when they are respectful and inclusive (Battistitch, Solomon & Dellucchi, 1993). This then means that teachers should effectively use discussions in order to achieve positive results. Learners attain understanding after interacting with the subject matter in a conducive environment as in group discussion and other participatory learning methods.

Scholars have written about the merits of discussion methods. Long (1975), found that using discussion methods when teaching Social studies in schools was positively correlated with following current events in the media and discussing political matters with friends and family. This is in line with the development of citizenship skills. The learners will develop interest in their country's affairs and

take part in making informed decisions for example, voting or making a contribution on issues affecting their community.

Discussion methods also provide an arena for the creative use of controversy among students over divergent points of view regarding the topic at hand. Research has shown that such conflicts can be properly exploited within a cooperative learning environment to expand learners' social and intellectual horizons (Sharan & Sharan, 1976). Research on students' behaviour within cooperative learning groups shows that students who gain most from cooperative work are those who give and receive elaborated explanations (Slavin, 1987). Giving students a reasonable measure of control over their experiences in school is acknowledged to constitute an effective way of increasing their motivation to engage in learning tasks (DeCharms, 1971, 1976; Sharan & Shaulov, 1989). This argument agrees with Nkunika (2004) who through his study, discovered that use of learner-centred methods lessen the risk of making Social studies a boring subject. Learners become motivated and interested when teachers use a variety of learner centred methods and relating content to real life experiences. This study complements Nkunika's study on the use of a variety of discussion methods to motivate learners. Social studies needs teaching and learning methods in which learners will be involved. Retention of knowledge and skills can be enhanced if learners are involved in doing an activity. This is why the methods used for teaching Social studies are mainly participatory, which will allow the learners an increasing role of active participation in the learning process (Mutebi & Matovu, 1993). These should be varied for motivation and to suit individual differences.

Provision of a variety of strategies is one way of engaging learners so that they are not bored if only one strategy is used.

Similar ambivalences and contradictions about the role of the schools in the development of political awareness and in citizenship training generally have been noted by other writers especially from England, who preferred to use the narrower term ‘political education’ rather than political socialisation (Gouran & Hirokawa, 1983). This had been necessitated mainly because England had political education as a subject. They confirmed that political attitudes that people take into adulthood begin to be defined while they are still in secondary school. Political education partly correlates with Malawian citizenship education especially in politics as learners are expected to fully participate in issues that affect them in their everyday life, one of them being political activities like voting, choosing and making informed decisions. Political education also improves the learners’ tolerance. Research indicates that the absence of critical thinking in the decision-making process of a group will almost always result in inferior and regrettable decisions (Gouran & Hirokawa, 1983; Gouran, Hirokawa & Martz, 1986; Janis, 1982, 1989). For example, many youth in Malawi are mostly used to incite violence especially in political rallies during the election campaigns. When learners have tolerance as a citizenship skill, they will refuse such irresponsible practices, they will learn to listen to different political views and eventually make informed choices.

Absalom (2006) researched on the use of inquiry-oriented pedagogies in addressing issues of ecological sustainability in science on the issue of deforestation in Australia. Strategies encouraging reflection included role-playing, class discussions, curriculum development activities, teaching experiences with children and field trips to a nature preserve area. This resulted into learners developing their own plans and programs to follow on ecological sustainability. This study in Science relates with my study as learner-centred methods were used to generate knowledge hence accepting social constructivism as a theory of learning.

Sabola (2009) found that Social studies, being a new subject introduced in 2001 in secondary schools, needed extensive teacher orientation so that it can properly be taught. MoEST (2001) states that Social studies seeks to provide pupils with the knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values which will enable them to participate actively and intelligibly in daily life activities as citizens of a democratic society. Sabola's study provides a hint on how Social studies teachers should teach so that learners can attain the citizenship skills.

Discussion methods enhance skills which are needed for active participation in the society. Brandt (1994) explained that educators and the public need to understand why society will be better served if schools clarify their purposes; reorganize as necessary to achieve these skills and knowledge needed for success in life. Hahn, Angell, and Tocci (1988) explained that when students are allowed

to discuss Social studies in an open and supportive classroom environment, there are often positive outcomes for students' feelings of political interest, efficacy, confidence and empathy. A study of discussion-based approaches to literature instruction in middle and high school classrooms in England (involving almost one thousand students) found that higher levels of discussion-based instruction about reading assignments were associated with more abstract and elaborated reports, analyses, and essays based on the readings (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003). This study was done in literature but it also used social constructivism. This provides a yardstick to this study as it also uses social constructivism.

In South Africa, their curriculum advocated learner centred approaches (Willis & Kissane, 1995). The Outcome Based Education which was introduced in the 1990's by the post-apartheid government as part of its curriculum program advocated learner centred methods. In Malawi, Outcome Based Education was also introduced in 2001 in primary schools following the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) (Chiziwa, 2012). Outcome Based Education was a curriculum reform that enforced learner centred methods as advocated through the introduction of participatory learning methods through the curriculum review of 1997 (MOE, 2001). Chiziwa's study discovered that primary school teachers were not extensively oriented on the use of participatory approaches contradicting what Sabola (2008) suggested that teachers needed extensive orientation. This study then will find out if the secondary school teachers were extensively oriented

on the use of learner-centred approaches such as discussion methods to teach Social studies.

Mtika and Gates (2009) conducted research on participatory learning and discovered that appropriation and application of learner centred approaches is constrained by various factors. Sometimes teachers do not know how to use them. Lack of teachers who specialise to teach certain subjects has also been recorded in literature as an obstacle to successful use of the required pedagogical skills as teachers devote more time struggling with content than pedagogy. Raudenbush, Eamsukkawat, Di.-Ibor, Kamali and Taoklam, 1993 have argued for specialisation. They contend that instruction improves if teachers spend more time teaching the subject matter they know best and that teachers learn faster if they concentrate time and energy on those subjects in which they have a special interest. This means if Social studies teachers concentrate on their subject, they will develop expertise in both content and the teaching methodology. Chiziwa (2012) highlights that primary school teachers face problems because they do not specialise in their teaching subjects hence they cannot confidently manipulate all the areas in their teaching subjects. This brings a need to explore the experience of secondary school teachers who actually specialise in two teaching subjects as such become competent in the content and pedagogical skills. This also can give chance to these teachers to confidently use various learner centred methods like discussion. If Social studies teachers can intensify the use of discussion methods, then learners can easily attain citizenship skills because the teachers would develop expertise. The use of discussion methods by Social studies teachers in

secondary schools needs to be studied in depth to find out how they use discussion methods in their classrooms.

Mhango (2004) conducted a study which aimed at investigating how Social studies teachers applied methods learnt in college into actual classroom situation. The results of this study indicated that despite putting the learner-centred activities in the teaching materials, most teachers planned and taught using teacher-centred approaches.

Yet in another study, Mhango (2008) investigated how primary school teachers in Malawi plan and implement Social studies lessons. The results showed that teachers still did not plan their work. Planning is an important element in teaching. Planning ensures that teachers know what pedagogies they will use in the course of teaching and learning process. Michaelis (1980) agrees with Dewey (1938) that when planning, the teacher must state what learners will be able to do during class work and after instruction. Unfortunately, planning alone cannot grant that the teachers will use the planned activities. It is therefore important to find out through this study how the planned work is implemented in a classroom situation.

Studies done by Muhuta (2004) and Chawala (2004) both indicated that most lecturers use teacher-centred methods while asking students to use learner-centred methods when they go to teach. They agreed that it does not make sense to tell

someone a thing when you are not practising it. Using constructivist ideas in college can assist student-teachers because they are more likely to use them when teaching learners in their lessons. In the same way, the learners in schools where these student-teachers will be teaching are more likely to apply what they have learnt at school in their societies. This study therefore investigated whether this applies to the Social studies teachers that I engaged.

2.6 Theoretical framework

This research was based on the constructivism theory of learning. Constructivism is the idea that conceptual understanding is primarily developed through activity: the learner actively constructs their own understanding of concepts and their inter-relationships (Glaser, 1990 & Resnick, 1989). Learners should engage in discussions which help the retention of concepts. Learners experience and eventually internalise various 'psychological tools' that advance their cognitive development to higher levels when they interact with peers, teachers and parents (Vygotsky, 1981). According to Crouch and Mazur (2001), peer discussion is critical to the success of peer instruction. It encourages active engagement by students with subject matter, a condition they feel is necessary for the development of complex reasoning skills.

The concept of constructivism has roots in classical antiquity, going back to Socrates' dialogues with his followers, in which he asked directed questions that led his students to realise for themselves the weaknesses in their thinking. The

Socratic dialogue is still an important tool in the way constructivist educators assess their students' learning and plan new learning experience. Teachers still use questions in their classrooms to assess learning. Jean Piaget and John Dewey developed theories of childhood development and education, which we now call progressive education that led to the evolution of constructivism. Piaget believed that humans learn through the construction of one logical structure after another. He concluded that the logic of children and their modes of thinking are initially entirely different from these of adults while Dewey called for education to be grounded in real life experiences.

Social and psychological constructivist theories of learning focus on how people make meaning both on their own and in interaction with others (Woolfolk, 2007). There is no one constructivist theory of learning, but most constructivists share two main ideas: 'that learners are active in constructing their own knowledge and that social interaction is important to knowledge construction' (Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004). Constructivism views learning as more than receiving and processing information transmitted by teachers or texts. Rather, learning is the active and personal construction of knowledge (de Kock, Sledgers & Voeten, 2004).

One way to organise constructivist views is to talk about two forms of constructivism: psychological and social construction (Palinscar, 1998 & Phillips, 1997). Piaget's psychological constructivism can be summarized as a focus on

how individuals use information, resources and even help from others to build and improve their mental models and problem-solving strategies. In contrast, Vygotsky's social constructivists see learning as increasing our abilities to participate with others in activities that are meaningful in the culture (Windschitl, 2002).

The teaching of Social studies using discussion methods adopts both the psychological and the social constructivism of learning because the learners in this case get knowledge depending on their stages of development according to Piaget. They also gain knowledge by constructing it with the teacher and their friends in class through classroom interactions. Brooks & Brooks (2001, p.34) explained that "educators must invite students to experience the world's richness, empower them to ask their own questions and seek their own answers, and challenge them to understand the world's complexities'. Schools can better reflect the complexities and possibilities of the world. They can be structured in ways that honour and facilitate the construction of knowledge. They become settings in which teachers invite students to search for understanding, appreciate uncertainty, and inquire responsibly. They become constructivist schools.

Bobbitt (1924, p.8) argues that "education is primarily for adult life, not for child life. Its fundamental responsibility is to prepare for the fifty years of adulthood, not for the twenty years of childhood and youth". Dewey (1938), however, argued that education for adult life denied the inherent ebullience and curiosity

children brought to school, and removed the focus from students' present interests and abilities to more abstract notion of what they might wish to do in future years. Dewey (1938) argued that education be viewed as a process of living and not a preparation for future living. This means then that education must represent present life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighbourhood, or on the playground. So education should equip learners with the skills with which to tackle life challenges wherever they are. Discussion methods achieve that by allowing children to interact with and contribute towards their learning in the classroom thereby gaining citizenship skills for use in their society.

One essential principle in Vygotsky's theory is the existence of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Murray (1993) cited in Schutz (2004) explains that ZPD is the difference between the learner's capacity to solve problems on his or her own, and his or her capacity to solve problems with assistance. Clearly, two levels are prominent from the ZPD. First is the actual level of development which refers to the level at which a learner can perform tasks independently without any assistance. The second level is the potential level of development with the assistance of more competent individuals which is also called scaffolding (Schutz, 2004). In Vygotsky's constructivism, scaffolding means supporting the learners with their learning by providing tasks and guidance for them to learn. The person providing comprehensive assistance could be the teacher, parent or peers (Vygotsky, (1978) cited in Young and Wilson, (2006). Thus, scaffolding requires the teacher to provide the learners with a wide range of opportunities to practice

citizenship skills and motivate them as they strive to develop the skills. By using discussion methods in teaching Social studies, learners deal with real life situations which equip them with decision-making and problem-solving skills. This can influence them to be critical in their day-to-day endeavours. They can manage to find solutions to real life problems individually or through interaction with others. The more advanced, or more knowledgeable students help those less advanced to achieve higher levels of conceptual acquisition (Bruner, 1985). Halpern (1967) and Lindsey (1988) encourage educators to allow students to teach each other. “The effort involved in teaching is similar to the effort required in learning. All teachers have probably had the experience of never really understanding a topic until they have taught it. The same is true for students”. (Lindsay, 1988, p.64). They will understand content after interacting with it.

The teaching of Social studies using participatory approaches like discussion methods helps learners to explore many sides of an issue and finally make an informed decision after weighing the options. The classroom deliberations help learners to develop citizenship skills such as tolerance, cooperation, respect for others and their opinions, love, trust and others. Malawi education should follow the Roman’s *eductio*, the bringing out and the development of human potential, aiming at forming more developed and civilized human beings (Kellner, 2003).

Social constructivist theory emphasizes social interaction among learners to maximise learning (Vygotsky, 1962). Jacobs (2001) cited in Verenikina (n.d, p.5)

argues that the term scaffolding can be used as an umbrella term to describe the way that “teachers or peers supply students with the tools they need in order to learn”. Britton (1975), Bruner (1971) and Dewey (1916) contend that education is an effect of community, clearly a number of communities contribute to the education of any individual and one of these is the classroom. In other words, teachers need to set up tasks that will challenge students to perform beyond current capacity and require community assistance like the peers and parents.

2.7 Application of the theoretical framework to the study

The first principle of social constructivism is dialogue. Learners participate in a social activity in the classroom through classroom dialogue which creates the spirit of equality, mutuality, and cooperation that animates them. In addition, classroom dialogue can serve as a useful mechanism for promoting the development of individual argumentation. Dialogue, as a communication form which is common in discussion methods is consistent with the pluralistic ideals of a democratic society. Dialogue has long been embraced by educators concerned with empowering their students to become independent thinkers and active citizens (Dewey, 1966; Freire, 1970; Kuhn, 1992). This implies that discussion methods serve to empower learners with citizenship skills through dialogue. Vygotsky, a proponent of social constructivism, claimed that learning occurs through social dialogue because learners construct their own knowledge through interaction with others (Feldman, 2009).

Another principle is language. Language helps us to think, make inferences, tackle difficult decisions and solve problems and shapes our basic ideas (Whorf, 1956). Language can be thought of as a tool for representing ideas (Bruner, 1964). Complex skills and difficult material can be learned in shorter times if the learner verbalizes the information. This leads to cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Astington (1999), Astington and Baird (2005) assert that children do not acquire understanding on their own, rather through participation in social activities they come to share their culture's way of seeing and talking about people's relations to one another and the world. If information is to be retained in memory and related to information already in the memory, the learner must engage in some sort of cognitive restructuring or elaboration of the material through discussions. Language forms a medium of communication when generating knowledge through discussion methods. (Slavin, 1990).

One of the most effective means of elaboration is explaining the information to someone else. Verbal interaction has always been an important way by which people learn (Stanford & Roark, 1974; Palmerton, 1993). This is what constitutes discussion methods where learners are able to develop higher order thinking skills (formal operations) through internalising the viewpoints of other people, which takes place during discussions with others while working in small groups (Barnes & Todd, 1977). Vygotsky (1978) explains that the process of making sense of the world is profoundly influenced by one's interactions with and perceptions of one's environment. Speech functions as a means by which people construct and reconstruct their views of the world. Learners in the classroom use language to

interact. This brings understanding as they repeat, verbalise what others have said. By interacting, learners construct arguments and add-ons which help them to retain knowledge.

Scaffolding is another principle of constructivism (Brooks & Brooks, 2001; Elkind, 1981; Haney & McArthur, 2002). Yager (2000) cited in Snowman, McCown and Biehler (2009) define constructivism as a process of creating knowledge to solve problems and eliminate disequilibrium. Scaffolding is a powerful conception of teaching and learning in which teachers and students create meaningful connections between teachers' cultural knowledge and the everyday experiences of the student (McCaslin & Mickey, 2001 cited in Woolfolk, 2007). Scaffolding demands teachers, peers and reference materials like dictionaries to help learners achieve their goals. In discussion methods, much as teachers provide guidance and scaffold learners, working in small groups helps learners to give peer scaffolding to one another.

Teachers, parents and peers supply students with the tools they need in order to learn (Jacobs, 2001). Learners can easily understand a concept explained by a fellow student who has just grasped it than the same concept explained by the teacher who is on a much higher plane (Vygotsky, 1978). Students' explain using simple language of their level than the teachers' language which makes it easy to understand. Teachers should provide questions, probe, and provide guidelines for the learners to perform tasks perfectly. When the learners are able to perform

tasks independently, the teacher can withdraw the scaffolding, just as a support structure in a building is removed when the building is finished (Yung & Wilson, 2006).

Constructivism advocates special pedagogical strategies which include prompting students for their positions and justification of reasons, explicitly drawing attention to the use of effective argument stratagems, modelling reasoning processes by thinking aloud, challenging students with countering ideas, keeping track of proposed arguments by summing up students contributions and using the vocabulary of critical and reflective thinking (Wagner, Sparatt, & Ezzaki (1981). These strategies are practiced in a classroom culture which is characterised by inquiry, collaboration among students, use of the teacher as a resource, explanation of points of view and solutions to problems to others and attempts to reach consensus about answers and solutions (Woolfolk, 2007).

Learners need to be motivated to learn because learning takes time. Teachers need to know the child's zone of proximal development which is the distance between what a child can do alone and what a child can do with help (Santrock, 2009). Instruction should remain within that zone (Kallat, 2008). Adults should provide appropriate hints and reminders, and they can solve more complicated problems with help than without it. For example, children improve their recall of a story when adults provide appropriate hints and reminders, and they can solve more complicated mathematics with help than without it (Kallat, 2008). Hence, teachers

need to set up tasks that challenge students to perform beyond their current capacity. Yung and Wilson (2000) argue that if the activities are not challenging enough, learners will be bored and possibly become unmotivated. When challenges test the potential level of the ZPD, discussion methods allow teachers or peers to assist learners or fellow peers through their interaction. This interaction facilitates solutions to different challenges that are posed to the learners.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed literature in participatory learning and discussion methods. The discussion has centred on types of discussion methods and their procedures. The paradigm shift from teacher-centred approach to learner-centred approach that has occurred due to democratic influences has also been discussed. The theoretical framework and its relevance has also been described and justified in line with the discussion methods.

Chapter 3

Research design and methodology

3.1 Chapter overview

This section describes and justifies the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative methodology used in the study. It also gives a description of the methods that were used to collect data. It further describes the sample and sampling procedures and the issues of research that were taken into considerations.

3.2 Theoretical orientation of the study

The way one views the world is determined by the paradigm one embraces. Niewenhuis (2007) defines a paradigm as a set of assumptions or beliefs about aspects of reality. It deals with the way people view the nature of reality (ontology) and how things can be known (epistemology) and assumptions about methodologies. The earliest researchers used the objective reality (Creswell, 1998). However, scholars now feel that objective reality does not give adequate explanations about human experiences. Today, there is a growing popularity of qualitative paradigm in social sciences (Creswell, 1998).

Following the birth of qualitative thought, several paradigms emerged. Some of these qualitative paradigms are; interpretivism, constructivism, structuralism, post structuralism, post modernism and naturalism (Wisker, 2008). These strands of paradigms are not conclusive as Punch (2009, p.54) observes that unlike

quantitative research, “qualitative research is multidimensional and pluralistic with respect to paradigms”. Despite the diversity, they share certain recurrent features. Some of these features are; researcher as the main instrument and prolonged field study. The researcher aims at gaining a holistic view of the context under study, and there is multiple interpretation of data among others (Punch, 2009).

Wisker (2008) observes that not all questions researchers ask about the world are predictable; many are to do with human interaction, perception, and interpretations which are based on constructivism.

On the one hand, those who believe that human behaviour is definable, fixable, and provable and can be described in a manner resembling rigid and unchanging facts, quantitative becomes the core methodology. On the other hand, one is engaged in qualitative methodology if he or she views the world as indefinable, interpreted as shifting in meaning based on who, when and why anyone carries out research and adds the meaning.

Stringer (2004), stresses that research which provides understanding of the perspectives of the people who are involved is likely to solve the problems in the classrooms or schools. For instance, there is need to understand the experiences and perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and administrators when formulating programs. This study sought to understand the experiences of

teachers in using discussion methods. The interpretive paradigm was used as a medium to unpack stories, experiences and voices of respondents. The study aimed at understanding the experiences of Social studies teachers when using discussion methods. Teachers' experiences are essentially attached to the meaning they make out of a new curriculum.

According to Punch (2009), the interpretive paradigm rejects the dominance of objective reality. It views reality as socially constructed based on the continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation. Interpretive paradigm concentrates on the meaning that people bring to a situation which they use to understand the world (O'Donoghue, 2007 as cited in Punch, 2009). Interpretivism therefore focuses on studying people in their natural setting. According to Denzin cited Stringer, (2004, p. 27), "understanding in interpretive sense enables us to project ourselves and enter into experience of the other, to understand what they think or feel about particular acts or events". Thus the researcher was the main Instrument in gathering data during the study. The researcher then interpreted the data.

3.3 Research design

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.134) define a research design as a "flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods of generating empirical material". Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) refer to research design as the researchers plan on how to proceed with the study. It locates researchers in the practical world and connects them to specific sites,

persons, groups or wherever materials for interpretation of the study are available. The researcher chose secondary school teachers who teach Social studies to unveil their experiences when using discussion methods. Hence the study was informed by the interpretive paradigm.

3.4 Research methodology

Methodology is viewed as “the rationale and the philosophical assumptions underlying a particular study” (Wisker, 2008, p.67). Since the interpretive paradigm is essentially inductive in that it creates theory and contributes to meaning rather than testing theory, qualitative methodology becomes the core approach. With this, the study engaged in a interpretive methodology. This agrees with the purpose of this study which sought to understand the experiences of teachers as they use discussion methods.

The use of qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to obtain a holistic in-depth understanding of the situation of Social studies teachers’ experiences as they are using discussion methods (Creswell, 2003). In addition, the nature of the research questions, which were open ended, determined the type of the methodology. The open ended questions allowed participants to express their experiences freely without obstruction. Since qualitative research is concerned with the context in which action takes place, the researcher carried out her study in the actual working environment of participants. This is so because of the argument that human behaviour is influenced by setting in which behaviour takes

place (Creswell, 2003). Sarantakos (2005), also comments that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them.

3.5 Pilot study

Bell (1993), stresses the importance of piloting in the study. He points out that all data gathering instruments should be pilot tested to test the time taken to complete answering the questions of the instrument, to check whether the questions are clear or not. Haralambos and Holborn (1991) also state that pilot studies may be used to develop research skills of those taking part.

Before devoting to the arduous and significant time commitment of a qualitative study, the researcher did a pilot study. The researcher conducted pre-interviews with selected participants, in this case, Social studies teachers, but these were from other schools other than the selected schools for the main study. All the instruments designed for the study were also pilot tested during the pilot study.

The pilot study assisted the researcher to establish effective communication patterns useful when conducting the real research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By including some time for the review of records and documents, the researcher uncovered some insights into the shape of the study that previously was not apparent.

The pilot study also assisted the researcher to refine some research questions and instruments which were not clear for example the first question wanted to know if the teachers have ever used discussion methods when teaching. The question was refined to ask about their knowledge of discussion methods.. It also assisted the researcher to properly shape the research in terms of time and resources as the pilot study had the same characteristics as the research itself. The researcher tested the instruments with several teachers to ensure clarity of the research questions and time taken to complete the interview. During piloting, some of the questions were not clear and others needed paraphrasing. The questions were refined to make them clearer. The pilot phase carried out a total of twelve semi-structured interviews and several post lesson mini-interviews. The pilot study also provided an opportunity to practice on how data would be organised and analysed during the main study. For example, the researcher realised that the tape recorder she was using had a small capacity and needed replacement.

3.6 Research sample

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), sampling refers to the process of selecting a portion of population under study. Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth. Qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random (Kuzel, 1992, Morse, 1989). Nieuwenhuis (2007) defines purposive sampling as selecting the sample because of some defining characteristics that makes them relevant for the intended data. Burgess (1994), Hitchcock and Hughes (1989), Crossley and Vulliamy (1997) among others, emphasise that informants are selected on the basis of the special

contribution that the researcher believes they can make to the situation being studied. They explain that there is need to seek out people who possess knowledge about specialised interests and concerns in the social setting, people whom the researcher feels are integral to the scenes and situations being investigated. The researcher purposively selected four schools where Social studies was taught. According to Stringer (2004, p. 45), this ensured that “the diverse perspectives of people likely to affect the issue are included in the study”

The target population in this study were the Social studies teachers of Blantyre in the South West Education Division. Four teachers teaching in both junior and senior classes were sampled. One teacher was sampled from each school. These schools were chosen because they were within a manageable distance to the researcher.

Table 1: Schools, names of teachers and teaching subjects

Name of school	Teacher`s name	Sex	Qualification	Teaching subjects	Class	Work experience in years
A	1	F	Diploma in Education	Social studies/Geography	3	10
B	2	M	Degree in Education	Social studies/Bible Knowledge	3	5
C	3	M	Degree in Education	Social studies/Life skills	1	6
D	4	F	Diploma in Education	Social studies/Geography	2	8

Source: Head teachers file, (2015)

3.7 Study site

Blantyre District is divided into two areas, rural and urban setting. The district is divided into zones. A zone is an area within the district where seven schools are closely located (Mipando, C.; Blantyre Rural Desk Officer). There are five private schools and four public schools in Limbe Zone where the researcher conducted her study. In this zone, the researcher chose four schools: A, B, C and D in order to capture different experiences from different context.

Schools in Limbe Zone are within a walking distance from Soche Hill where she stays. Most of them have accessible roads except schools A and C which are inaccessible during the rainy seasons.

For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher changed the original names of the schools into pseudonyms which are A, B, C, and D as mentioned earlier.

3.8 Research ethical considerations

Ethical issues considered in this study included gaining access to teachers, getting informed consent and assurance of confidentiality to participants.

Jansen (2007) states that obtaining permission to access participants, protecting the identity of participants and confidentiality of the results is significant to research ethics. Furthermore, Neuman (2003) explains that ethically it is believed that it is not enough to get permission from people “they need to know what they are being asked to participate in so that they can make an informed decision”. So the researcher got an introductory letter from the University of Malawi (Appendix

A) to be presented in the schools that had been chosen for the study. Permission was also sought through the Education Division in which these schools are situated. The researcher was given a verbal go-ahead with an instruction that she should present her letters at the schools where the research would be done.

When the researcher arrived in the schools, she explained the purpose of her visit and her research thoroughly to the headteacher of the school. Then the researcher requested for the information about the Social studies teachers in the school for example, qualifications, and years of service and years of teaching Social studies. The researcher then approached the Social studies teachers herself and sought their informed consent to participate in the study.

Informed consent is a channel of explaining to the people so that they can understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so that they can decide consciously whether they would participate or not. It is one of the most important channels of ensuring that participants finish their work in the study. In this research, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and what procedures to be followed (see Appendix B). After that, the participant would be asked whether they were willing to participate. The researcher also requested for permission to record the information they provided and advised them that they may withdraw at any stage (Creswell, 2003). The participants verbally agreed to take part.

It is important to protect the anonymity of participants because they participate for an extended period and hence reveal highly sensitive events. They also speak of very private matters which can be harmful to them and to others (Stringer, 2004). The researcher assured the participants that their information would be highly confidential and their identities will be hidden. The participants were also assured that the information that they provide would be used for academic purposes only. In line with this, their names would be replaced with pseudo names for both people and schools (Cohen et al, 2007; Cohen & Manion, 1994). The researcher used the following pseudo names for teachers; 1, 2, 3 and 4. For schools, she used the following letters: A, B, C and D.

3.9 Data generation

There are several data generation procedures for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the researcher used two data generating procedures for the purpose of triangulation. Stringer (2004) defines triangulation as the use of multiple and different sources, methods and perspectives to corroborate, elaborate or illuminate the research problem and its outcome. This helps to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being perceived (Stakes, 1994). Further, Simpson and Tuson (1995) posit that any tool for gathering data provides one picture of the social world, thus different techniques enrich understanding on what is going on. In this study, the researcher used interview and observation. These were divided into semi-structured interviews, observation and post-lesson-observation interview.

3.9.1 Classroom observation

Marshall and Rossman (1995) define observation as a systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study. They add that even in studies using in-depth interviews, observation plays an important role as the researcher notes the interviewee's body language and effect in addition to her words. The researcher observed Social studies lessons especially the teacher using discussion methods in the classroom.

The researcher chose observation because this is the only way the researcher could see the discussion method in session. It is also a systematic process of recording data of behavioural patterns of the participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them (Kobus, 2007). It also enables the researcher to gain deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed and that it allows the investigator to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as participants do (Kobus, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (1995) add that through observation the researcher learns about behaviours and meanings attached to those behaviours and it is used to discover complex interaction in natural social settings. Observation provides information which is more direct than data from any other source. It gives direct access to the events or interaction which is the focus of the research (Simpson & Tuson, 1995). Patton (1990) adds that the observation method assist the researcher to get data that the respondents may be unwilling to provide during interviews. During observation, the researcher was able to analyse the level of knowledge that

teachers have in discussion methods. This was reflected in their lesson presentations.

The researcher carried out thirty-nine lesson observations during the study with the aim of observing lessons in which discussion methods were used. Three Social studies teachers were observed for ten times while one was observed nine times because she was going away during the last visit. During lesson observations, the researcher used classroom observation guide (see Appendix D) which was used concurrently with Appendices E to I to observe specific types of discussion methods that emerged during the study. Ten observations were made in order to ensure observation rigour (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008) and to offset certain staged tendencies on the part of the teachers being observed. The researcher used inductive observation where the researcher did not disclose the focus of the observation in order to allow the research participants to freely use the methods they liked to use. The observation also enabled the researcher to triangulate findings from the interviews conducted before lesson observations and the post lesson observation interviews. The researcher conducted post lesson interviews to probe more into some practices observed during the lesson. During the initial observations, the participants were not free, but after some time they became flexible and taught in a free and relaxed manner.

3.9.2 Interviews

The researcher conducted face to face semi-structured interviews with the teachers in the study in order to find out what teachers know about discussion

methods and how they use the same in their classrooms. The researcher used an interview guide (see Appendix E). To ensure rigour, the researcher also interviewed the teachers after observing the lessons. This ensured maximum clarifications on the issues observed. Nieuwenhuis (2007) defines an interview as a “two way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and learn about ideas, beliefs, opinions and behaviours of participants” (p.56). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), state that the advantage of interview is that it allows opportunities for probing, and does not require writing skills.

In addition, interview makes it possible to measure what a person knows, what a person likes or dislikes and what a person thinks. Marshall and Rossman (1995), state that volumes of data can be generated through interviews.

The researcher observed the lesson procedures from the beginning to the end of the lesson. The teachers were interviewed after the lesson was completed. This allowed for reflection and a follow up on some observations that the researcher made in the lesson just taught. Below is a summary of the data generation methods in the study and their corresponding research question.

Table 2: Data generation matrix

Research question	Data source/Method	Procedure
What do teachers of Social studies know about discussion methods?	Interview Lesson observation	The researcher conducted face to face interviews with the participants. The researcher observed Social studies lessons conducted by the participants.
How do teachers use discussion methods in teaching and learning?	Lesson observation Post lesson observation interview	The researcher observed Social studies lessons conducted by participants. The researcher conducted post lesson interviews with the participants.
What are the challenges that secondary school teachers face in using discussion methods to teach Social studies?	Lesson observation Post lesson observation interview	The researcher observed Social studies lessons conducted by the participants. The researcher conducted post lesson interviews.
How do teachers deal with these challenges?	Interview Lesson observation	The researcher interviewed Social studies teachers. The researcher observed Social studies lessons conducted by the participants.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the study

Qualitative research deals with trustworthiness as an issue of research rigour.

Gibbs (2007) in Creswell (2009) indicates that the qualitative researcher uses certain procedures to check the accuracy of the findings in order to ensure qualitative validity while making sure that his approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects to ensure qualitative reliability.

The researcher generated data from 7th January 2015 to 25th April, 2015. This prolonged period enabled the researcher to establish relationship of trust with the participants and gain greater access to their knowledge and practices. This helped the researcher to discard superficial information (Stringer, 2004). The long stay in the field helped to modify the participants' attitude towards the researcher's presence thereby making them behave normally. Creswell (2009) explains that if a researcher has more experience with the participants in their actual setting, qualitative rigour is enhanced.

During research, participants were given chance to review their recorded or transcribed data so as to verify their initial presentations. This ensured correctness of data and some participants could add some points which they forgot. For example, Teacher 4 remembered that she learnt discussion methods while at the teacher training college.

3.11 Data analysis

The first step in data analysis is data entry and storage. The researcher then transcribed the data. Transcribing offers another point of transition between data generation and analysis as part of data management and preparation. The researcher did all interview transcriptions herself which gave the researcher an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent issues (Patton, 1990).

Although Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight that qualitative data are labour intensive, the researcher thinks they give room for critical reflection and also give chance to get a feel for the cumulative data as a whole (Patton, 1990). The researcher then used Appendix D to conduct classroom observations which were followed up by the face-to-face semi structured interviews as a reflection of the lesson observed.

The researcher made sure that all the data was available in the database. She made copies for safe storage, for writing on, and for cutting and pasting. This data was put into smaller meaningful parts. Then the researcher labelled each chunk with a code. Coding is defined as marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or category names (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This is a means of sorting the descriptive data that was generated so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. The researcher then compared the codes to identify emerging themes. Data was also being compared to the initial research questions to find the answers. Later, the coded data was critically analysed to find out any differences and similarities. The differences and similarities enabled the researcher to bring together larger data into broader category. Those sharing similar characteristics were assigned to a broad category. Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasise that broader categories have the power to explain and predict phenomenon hence data became manageable and easy to interpret.

The coding resulted into nine sub themes. Table 3 shows these sub themes.

Table 3: Summary of all sub-themes

Sub themes
Lack of competence of using discussion methods
Large classes
Lack of reinforcement by managers
Lack of teaching and learning materials
Lack of resourcefulness by the teachers
Unpreparedness by teachers
Scanty knowledge from the teachers
Reluctance to use discussion methods
Forgetfulness by the teachers

The above data analysis was compared to the theoretical framework and it yielded four major categories namely: teachers' experiences, teachers' knowledge, purpose, and challenges.

Table 4. Major and sub themes

Theme	Sub theme
Teachers` experiences of using discussion methods	Lack of competence Lack of reinforcement Lack of resourcefulness Reluctance
Teachers` knowledge of discussion methods	Inefficient Forgetfulness
Purpose of using discussion methods	Pass time Beat lack of resources
Challenges faced when using discussion methods	Large classes Lack of resources

3.12 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the theoretical orientation of the study informing the study. The research design and research methodology which have been used have been discussed. The study used the interpretive paradigm which affirms that reality is socially-constructed based on a continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation by the researcher.

In this chapter, I have argued that the interpretive paradigm was ideal for this study because the study focused on teacher experiences when using discussion methods. The chapter has explained how trustworthiness was ensured in the process of conducting the study. Finally, it has highlighted how data was managed and analysed to come up with codes and categories that were useful for making sense of the large volume of textual data collected.

The next chapter deals with the study findings and discusses them based on the major categories generated from the study. In addition, the findings are examined against previous related literature and the theoretical framework presented in chapter two.

Chapter 4

Results and discussion of the findings

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. As discussed in Chapter One, the study sought to find out the use of discussion methods in teaching Social studies. The findings of the study are based on the research questions. The study came up with five themes on the use of discussion methods namely: teachers' knowledge of discussion methods, teachers' use of discussion methods, and types of discussion methods used, purpose and challenges that the teachers faced. The findings of the study are presented and discussed along these themes.

4.2 Teachers' knowledge of discussion methods

During face-to-face interviews, the teachers were asked to describe their knowledge of discussion methods. One of the teachers had this to say;

“I know some of the discussion methods like group discussion, debate and whole class discussion, only that I have forgotten the procedures to be followed. I don't know how to use discussion methods like the symposium and panel”. (Teacher 4, face –to-face interview).8/01/15

Another teacher observed that;

I can use whole class discussion, group discussion and debate. Although this is the case, I do not like using them because they induce indiscipline in the classroom. Most learners think it is time to chat instead of doing the work they are assigned to.(Teacher 1, face-to-face interview). 4/03/15

In addition another teacher had this to say;

I have a very faint idea of discussion methods from secondary school which I attended. I can't competently use them in class when teaching Social studies. The other problem is that my class has a large number of students which makes it difficult to implement methods centred on dialogue and discussion. The only time I use group discussion is when I am using textbooks because they are very few. (Teacher 3, face-to-face interview).19/02/15

The teachers in this study indicated that they had limited understanding of the specifics of discussion methods. During interviews, it was confirmed that the teachers' knowledge of discussion methods was limited to whole class discussions, group discussions and debate. They were aware of other discussion methods such as symposium, and panel discussions among others but were not confident to use them in the classroom.

The study also revealed that the teachers lacked knowledge of procedures for conducting discussion methods effectively in class; they feared that the use of discussion methods may cause classroom management problems. Furthermore, the class sizes made it difficult to conduct teaching and learning in small groups. It was also noted in Teacher 3's interview that the only time that he used group discussion was because he had limited books, not necessarily for the learners to learn cooperatively.

Despite the limitations revealed through the study, the teachers indicated that discussion methods are important when teaching Social studies. Discussion

methods were said to be important because they improved students' classroom interactions and that learners learn best from each other. One of the teachers had this to say;

“Discussion methods improve interactional skills of the learners”
(Teacher 4, face to face interview).26/03/15

In addition another teacher said;

“Some students can understand better when fellow learners teach them” (Teacher 3, face to face interview).4/03/15.

Out of the thirty-nine lessons observed in this study, twelve used whole class discussion, five used group discussion and one used debate (see the table).

Table 5: Use of discussion methods in the study

Teacher	Size of class	Topic	Teaching and learning materials	Size of groups	Discussion method used	Length of each discussion (minutes)
4	61	The citizen and the community	1 book		Small Group discussion	15
						7
					Whole Class discussion	6
						5
						5
1	58	Is voter apathy a solution to our problems?	1 book	29	Whole Class discussion	8
						5
						3
						6
					debate	4
3	60	Symbols of National Unity	7 books	10	Small Group discussion	20

None of the lessons used other discussion methods other than those in the table. The use of discussion methods was ineffective. Three out of four teachers who used discussion methods in this study did not follow any specific procedures for conducting the discussions. For example in Teacher 4's class, the learners were told to be in groups before they were told what to discuss. They went into the groups and waited for the teacher to tell them what to do, making the lesson longer and boring. Teacher 2 admitted that he partially knew the methods which made it difficult to use them in class. Whole class discussions were used for 15 to 20 minutes in this class and the teachers were more comfortable to use this method. When it came to the other methods (group discussion and debate) of teaching, they were used in short segments ranging from 3 minute to 8 minute sessions. Sometimes it was not clear if the students had concluded their discussion. This confirmed the teachers' comments that they were not confident with the procedures for conducting discussion methods effectively.

Furthermore, the teachers in this study did not assign any individual roles to the learners during group discussion so as to avoid free-rider effects. However, they managed to put learners in groups and probed the learners to provide scaffolding to the learner, this improved their interactional skills. The teachers also supervised the groups to make sure they were on track.

From the findings, it shows that the Social studies teachers observed used discussion methods ineffectively and therefore did not achieve the goal of the

social constructivist theory of generating knowledge. The Social studies teachers used discussion methods to achieve their own purposes (see 4.3.3). Failure to assign individual roles as suggested by Johnson and Johnson (1984) resulted into indiscipline as some learners just watched others discussing while they were busy chatting. These learners did not gain anything just as elaborated by Slavin (1987) who affirms that students who gain most from cooperative work are those who give and receive elaborated explanations. Discussion methods in Social studies are important to enhance cooperative learning and social interaction (Heller & Hollabough, 1991) which are important for enhancing citizenship skills (Mhango, 2008). The results in this study show that teachers were unable to attain this goal due to their limited knowledge of the skills for discussion methods as indicated by Chiziwa (2012) during his research studies conducted in primary schools.

4.2.1 Gender and discussion methods in class

Teachers in this study did not pay any attention to gender issues when putting students to work in discussion groups. For example in Teacher 4's class, she concentrated on asking more questions to the boys than girls. During Teacher 3's group discussion, some groups were comprised of boys only and others girls only. Other groups were either dominated by boys while others by girls. Furthermore, Teacher 1 did not follow the procedure of dividing the learners into two groups: opposing and proposing groups in the debate lesson. She also gave more speaking chances to boys than girls.

Gender issues are important in Social studies teaching as it is one of the key topics covered. Yet these teachers did not see the importance of ensuring that groups were gender balanced. Their practices, in the way groups were comprised in this study, contradicted the theory that they taught.

This meant more generation of knowledge in boys than girls thus contradicting Battistich, Solomon, and Delluchi, (1993) who advocate that discussion methods become effective when inclusive and respectful. This also made boys feel superior to the girls. The boys kept interrupting girls when they wanted to express themselves. This discouraged girls who also wanted to contribute their findings.

From the study findings, class sizes were generally large ranging from fifty eight to sixty one students under a single teacher (refer to Table10). From class observations, there were three discussion methods used by the teachers namely; classroom discussion, group discussion and debate. It was also noted that there were limited resources used during the discussion methods. Some classes had a single book used by the whole class. Consequently, most teachers preferred to use class discussions due to the limited resources. The classroom observations, therefore, revealed that the choice of discussion methods depended on the availability of resources to be used in the discussion by the students.

4.3 Most commonly used discussion method

There were three main discussion methods used by teachers in this study: whole class discussion, group discussion and debate. The figure summarises how the methods were used in the study.

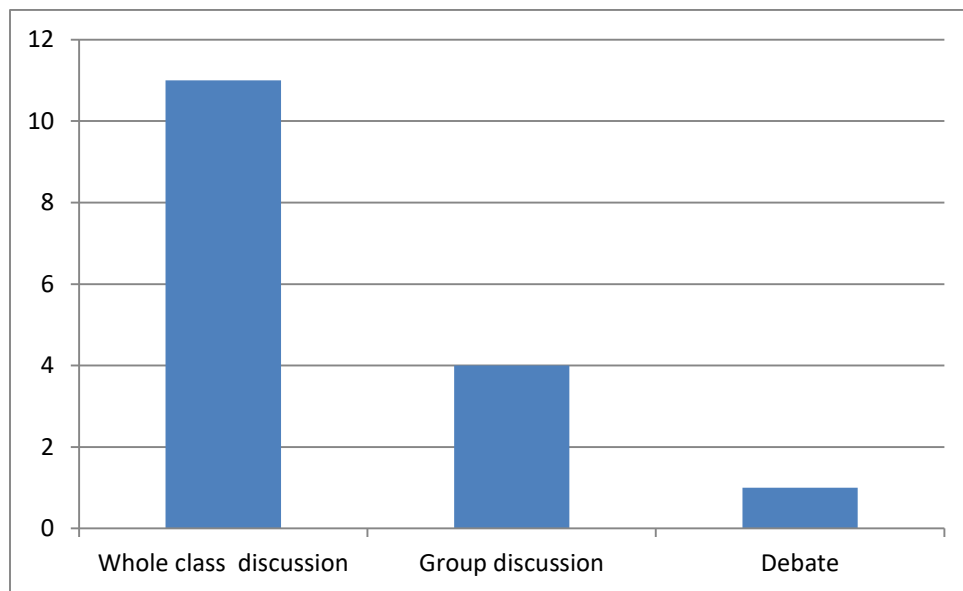


Figure 1. Frequency of the teaching methods teachers used in the study

Source: Researcher analysing data (2016)

The most common discussion method used by three out of the four teachers was whole class discussion. However, one teacher used group discussion. The teachers did not find it difficult to use classroom discussion method. It was perceived as less demanding to the teachers and the learners sometimes seemed to enjoy shouting aloud to give their answers without restrictions from the teachers. It gave them some kind of liberty. During classroom observation, the learners shouted answers and the teachers did not discipline them in any way.

Other discussion methods used were debate and group discussion. However, these methods were sparsely used by teachers. Teachers had limited knowledge of how to use them competently in teaching. Out of the thirty-nine lessons observed, four lessons used group discussion and only one lesson used the debate method.

From the findings above, it shows that the Social studies teachers observed used discussion methods ineffectively and therefore did not achieve the goal of the social constructivist theory of generating knowledge. This concurs with Chiziwa (2012) who established the problem of lack of knowledge in the primary school teachers. The Social studies teachers used discussion methods to achieve their own purposes just like Teacher 3 who used group work just to beat the shortage of books.

4.4 Purpose of using discussion methods

The study established that Social studies teachers had various purposes for using discussion methods. For example Teacher 4's group discussion was meant to pass time as she was not prepared to teach the learners.

Table 6: Teacher 4's lesson (33 minutes)

Topic: The citizen and the community
Teacher 4 just sat on a chair and was reading a book
Learners discussed for a long time without the teacher's supervision
Some learners were just chatting
Teacher 4 just concluded the lesson without learners' presentations of their findings. Learners took too long to settle in groups (see figure)



Figure 2. Students during Teacher 4's lesson

The most common discussion method which is classroom discussion was meant to cover a lot of content in a short time as in Teacher 1's lesson summarised below

Table 7. Teacher 1's lesson (20 minutes)

Topic: **Electoral process**

Teacher 1 divided the class into eight groups and she gave a sub topic to each group for discussion

Learners then presented their findings

Teacher 1 managed to cover a lot of content within 20 minutes

The debate which was done once in Teacher 1's classroom was just meant to clarify a point which was a source of disagreement among the learners.

Table 8. Teacher 1's debate lesson

Topic: **Voting Process**

Learners discussed that they did not see the advantages of voting

The learners explained that their member of parliament is useless and that voting was a waste of their time

Teacher 1 explained that it is called voter apathy and asked them if this was a good idea

Learners gave out their views supporting voter apathy

Teacher 1 concluded that voter apathy puts wrong candidates into positions

Teacher 3 used group discussion because of the problem of shortage of books in his classroom. The groups that were formed were overcrowded (see picture)



Figure 3. Overcrowded groups

During post lesson interview, Teacher 3 said the following:

This is the only time I can say I use group discussion when I am using textbooks because they are very few. I put learners in groups so that they can share books. Madam, you should also know that my university never taught me any teaching methodologies.
(Teacher 3, post lesson interview) 2/04/15

From the results, Teacher 3's explanation agrees with the two studies conducted by Mhango (2004) which indicated that despite putting learner-centred activities in the learning resources teachers still used teacher-centred approaches. Mhango (2008) also indicated that teachers planning and implementation are two things. It is important to see if the plans are implemented. Chawala (2004) and Muhuta (2004) also unveiled a problem with lecturers who encourage their students to use learner-centred approaches while they themselves teach the learners using teacher-centred approaches. This limits the students because they do not really know what to do in their classrooms. Mombe (2015) encourages teacher-educators to walk the talk of using learner centred approaches when teaching student-teachers rather than offering an empty lip-service so that the goals of Social studies should be achieved. It was established that use of discussion methods in this study was done to suit the teachers' purposes of using them as discussed in the study. This is contrary to the main purposes of using discussion methods.

4.5 Teachers' challenges in using discussion methods

The study noted that there were several challenges that teachers faced in using discussion methods. These included class management, lack of textbooks and desks and large classes.

4.5.1 Class management

Teachers in this study also had class management problems. Discussion methods are meant to be constructive and help learners construct new knowledge as they interact among themselves as stipulated in the social constructivist theory. This reflects Woolfolk (2007) who argued that people make meaning on their own and interaction with others. However, the discussion methods that the researcher observed did not benefit all the learners in class. For example in Teacher 4's class, some learners showed reluctance to be in groups during group discussion, they took time to be organised. Even when in their groups, some learners saw this as a playground. There was a lot of noise in the classrooms while a few discussed the concepts. In Teacher 1's class, the discussion was initially chaos as learners shouted out their ideas until the teacher came up with the idea of a debate. Some group work that was observed was also disorganised. Teacher 3 did not supervise the groups so the learners wasted time fighting over the position of the book and could not listen to what the teacher was saying. Some learners developed a negative attitude towards discussion methods as trouble shooters saw this as a playground, learners in Teacher 4's classroom showed reluctance to quickly form groups. Teacher 4 did not supervise some groups at the back of her class.

Teacher 4 explained that;

“I did not pay attention to the learners at the back especially the boys because they were troublesome and noisy, so I did not want to waste time on them” (Teacher 4, post lesson interview). 1/04/15

From the findings, the study concluded that discussion methods used could not improve learners interactional skills and the generation of knowledge because most learners did not discuss the items given. This contradicts Woolfolk (2007) who argues that people make meaning on their own and when interacting with others.

4.5.2 Lack of textbooks and desks

The other challenge that was common in all the four schools was lack of resources in the classrooms. At Teacher 1's and Teacher 4's schools, it was only the teachers who had a textbook each to refer to while the learners did not have anything. Teacher 3 had seven books against a class of sixty learners which made it difficult to use them in his classroom. In addition, Teacher 4's class had immovable furniture which made learners' mobility difficult when forming groups. Although school had books, they were insufficient and this caused overcrowding and indiscipline when learners scrambled to look at a book. This corresponds with Chiziwa (2012) who also unveiled this problem in primary schools. In Teacher 3's class, learners wasted time fighting on the position of the book so that everyone could see which was not possible.

Teacher 3 complained that:

“The problem is that my class has a large number of students which makes it difficult to implement methods centred on dialogue and discussion. You saw for yourself the scramble caused when books were being distributed and even when using them, learners seem to be unsettled trying to adjust themselves so that they can see a book properly”.(Teacher 3, post lesson interview). 24/04/15

This is another factor which contributed to lack of the use of discussion methods in some classrooms. Learners need to look at pictures in books and talk among themselves thereby enhancing interactional skills (Heller & Hollabough, 1991). Sometimes the teacher can achieve scaffolding among peers if learners can have reference materials to help their peers learn. In Teacher 4’s classroom, there was an awkward seating arrangement where some learners sat on desks while others sat on the floor just like in the figure.



Figure 4: Sitting arrangement in a classroom

Teacher 3 of School C complained that lack of text books forces him to put learners in groups so that each can see a book. When the study observed his class,

the groups were very big (ten students per group) and this proved unbeneficial to some learners who could not see the book due to overcrowding. Refer to Figure 2 which shows groups in Teacher 3's classroom.

The study wanted to know more about the situation, Teacher 3 explained that:

“I use what I can call group discussion when I put the learners in groups so that they can read Social studies books. Because the school does not have enough Social studies books (I cannot do otherwise). If the school had enough books, I would love individual work”.(Teacher 3 , post lesson interview) 24/04/15

From the findings, the study concluded that lack of textbooks is a common challenge which was also established by Chiziwa (2012) in the primary schools where he conducted his study. Lack of textbooks hinders learners from referring to books hence distracting their attention. Social studies teachers in this study seemed handicap as they could not freely use textbooks for fear of creating chaos where learners fought to look at a book. Interactional skills (Heller & Hollabough, 1991) and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1976) could not be achieved as conditions were not favourable for the learners to do so.

4.5.3 Large classes

Most classes observed in this study were large (refer Table 10). This problem was also unveiled in primary schools (Mhango, 2008; Kunje & Chimombo, 1999). This does not comply with MOE's ratio of 1:40 teacher-pupil ratio in schools (NESP 2008).The study observed that teachers had problems in supervising

groups in their classes as time could not allow them. The groups were too many compared to one teacher present. Large class sizes seem to explain why whole class discussion was the preferred method of discussion for all the three teachers, whole class discussion was characterized by no groups and chorus answers from the learners. However, it defeats the principle of dialogue, a social activity which improves critical thinking abilities as the learners did not have a chance to express themselves among peers and also discuss and reflect on their fellow learners' answers (Vygotsky, 1978). They just waited for the teachers to consolidate their ideas into right or wrong. Although there is some support from teachers which is needed by learners here, the task is not challenging enough and some learners gave up in trying to find solutions to the problems (Yung and Wilson, 2000). They waited for the teacher to choose the right answer for them.

This contradicts with the social constructivist theory which demands that classes should be small so that each learner gets attention (scaffolding) from the teacher because some learners in large classes did not get attention from the teacher due to lack of time. Teacher 4 confessed that:

“I did not pay attention to the learners at the back especially big boys because time was not on my side, so I just attended to a few groups”. (Teacher 4, post lesson interview). 15/01/15

Table 9. Observed class sizes

Teacher	Girls	Boys	Total
4	32	2	61
1	28	30	58
3	28	32	60
2	33	37	70

The results established that the class sizes were large. They exceeded MoEST recommended ratio of 1:40 (NESP 2008). Large classes were also unveiled in primary schools through studies conducted by Mhango, (2008); Chimombo and Kunje, (1999). This problem hindered teachers from using discussion methods effectively mostly because supervision was inadequate. Teachers also failed to provide enough scaffolding to the learners because they were too many in the classrooms which meant less generation of knowledge. Learners' interactions were generally futile as learners who gave up discussed personal affairs other than academic work.

4.6 Discussions of the findings

The analysis of data came up with four major categories explaining the use of discussion methods in teaching Social studies. These categories are: teachers' knowledge, types of discussion methods used, purposes and challenges, gender and discussion methods.

The curriculum shift claims that chalk and talk methods do not enhance citizenship. The shift to discussion methods as part of learner centred approaches enhances the development of citizenship. The use of discussion methods is impinged by lack of teachers' knowledge, ineffective use of discussion methods, large classes and lack of teaching and learning materials.

There are no differences in terms of experiences in all the four Social studies teachers. Lack of adequate knowledge is the most common challenge among all the four Social studies teachers. Inadequate teaching and learning materials and large classes compound the challenges faced by these Social studies teachers. Teachers need training in discussion methods. All the four Social studies teachers flouted the steps of the discussion methods which they used although none knew how to conduct any other types of discussion methods. The dominant use of class discussion shows that the Social studies teachers cannot comfortably use other types of discussion methods.

In my opinion, using discussion methods in teaching Social studies is vital in improving dialogical abilities of learners. Malawi cannot run away from this shift as it is in tandem with the democratic atmosphere. I suggest that Social studies teachers need proper training on the use of discussion methods. According to the findings of this study, ineffective use of discussion methods in Social studies affects the students' social skills such as understanding and communication (Kochhar, 1985). In addition, the social constructivist theory emphasizes the

generation of knowledge through learner interaction (Woolfolk, 2007; Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004) which is very minimal in all the lessons that were observed. Citizenship skills were not achieved in the lessons observed (Mhango, 2008) as learners did not have enough time to discuss hence no improvement in democratic values of tolerance, empathy and critical thinking. Svensson (1977), Applebee, Langer, Nystrand and Gamoran (2003) and Farrant (1988) argue that a deep approach of content through learner centred methods like discussion induces a high level of understanding, this is lacking in the Social studies teachers that were observed during the study. In the next chapter, I present the conclusions drawn from the study and their implications.

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has unveiled the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. It has also discussed the findings in relation to the theoretical framework that guides the study in form of themes that in the next chapter, I present the conclusions drawn from the study and their implications.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Chapter overview

This study aimed at exploring the use of discussion methods in teaching Social studies in secondary schools. The study was based on the experiences of four Social studies teachers from four secondary schools in Blantyre. This chapter provides conclusion based on the findings of the study. It also provides the implications of the study and areas for further research.

5.2 Conclusions

The main research question guiding the study was “how do teachers use discussion methods to promote learning in Social Studies classrooms in Malawi secondary schools?” This was followed by the following research questions. The first specific research question was “what knowledge do teachers of Social studies have about discussion methods?”

On the question of how teachers use discussion methods to promote learning in Social studies classrooms in Malawi secondary schools, it can be concluded that there is partial promotion of learning as discussion methods are not effectively used by the teachers in this study.

On the question of the knowledge that Social studies teachers have about discussion methods, it can be concluded that the Social studies teachers lack

sufficient knowledge. They admitted having less knowledge on some discussion methods and totally ignorant on other discussion methods. This is so because there is little or no orientation about the various discussion methods that are supposed to be used in teaching Social studies and their importance. This has led these Social studies teachers into using these methods informally. However, the teachers recognise the importance of using discussion methods such as improvement in interactional skills and that some learners understand better when fellow learners teach them.

On the question of how Social studies teachers use discussion methods in teaching, it can be concluded that Social studies teachers used discussion methods haphazardly. The teachers did whatever they thought was right in their usage of discussion methods and called it by the names they wanted. Most teachers did not know the procedures to be used. Most teachers lacked this knowledge. These Social studies teachers did not search for the knowledge on how to use discussion methods properly.

On the question of the challenges that Social studies teachers face when using discussion methods to teach, it can be concluded that lack of knowledge in the use of discussion methods is common in the schools that were observed. This had a negative impact on the learners as there was ineffective use of discussion methods hence crippling the development of citizenship abilities in the learners. This negatively affected the delivery of Social studies lessons. The study observed that

learners did not like being in groups, the learners also viewed discussion methods as methods of teaching for lazy teachers depending on the way they were conducted. Most learners could not benefit at all.

Another challenge was classroom management problems like making noise. The learners did not feel motivated to use discussion methods. Most learners had the feeling that discussion methods are a waste of time and would like the teacher to take authority over all the class work. By not paying attention to other learners in the class, these became bored and gave up any effort to carry out teachers' instructions. The teachers lacked scaffolding skills which could help these learners develop interest in doing their work independently with the help of their peers. Lack of scaffolding reflects back to teachers where learners could not participate and resorted to making noise thereby disrupting the other learners.

The study also established that large classes impinge the effective use of discussion methods because discussion methods require close supervision. In large classes, the teacher managed to supervise a few groups before the end of the lesson. Other groups were not supervised. Those groups which were not supervised did very little to generate knowledge to their learning thereby defeating the whole purpose of the theory of social constructivism. Learners felt that discussion methods had nothing to offer them in terms of their education.

Shortage of teaching and learning resources like textbooks and desks also contributed to ineffective use of discussion methods. Some Social studies teachers felt that discussion methods could be used to beat textbook shortage. The learners would be grouped to share a textbook. That is what they called group discussion. With few textbooks in the class, learners played in those groups. When learners could not see a book, they made noise because they had nothing to do. Teachers also failed to supervise learners who sat on the floor because of ethical issues. The female teacher failed to bend among learners seated on the floor. Apart from that, immovable furniture limited the learners when forming groups; it meant those sitting near each other would form a group creating gender imbalance in some groups.

The study has also established that discussion methods partially helped in improving learners' ability. This is due to the ineffective use. On the question of how the teachers deal with these challenges, it can be concluded that teachers do not do anything to solve this problem but they use their partial knowledge on discussion methods to teach Social studies. Teachers supervised few groups in large classes and avoided interacting with noisy makers. They beat lack of textbooks by putting learners in groups. Some of the groups were not gender-balanced.

5.3 Implications of the study

In view of the challenges and opportunities noted in the study the following are implications.

5.3.1 Teaching and learning resources

Teachers highlighted the shortage of books and desks in the schools as a challenge. This has negative effects on teachers as they cannot use discussion methods. At the same time, it is difficult for teachers to arrange groups as some learners sat on the floor.

5.3.2 Lack of knowledge of the teachers

The Social studies teachers lacked basic knowledge in using discussion methods. The two teachers 2 and 3 who graduated from universities do not know how to effectively use discussion methods because they did not practice them in their universities. This means that Social studies teachers still use the banking method of teaching instead of the discussion methods.

5.3.3 Lack of emphasis

School managers in these secondary schools do not emphasise the use of discussion methods by teachers in classrooms. Teachers fail to implement the discussion methods as there is no guidance and support from them.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The study investigated the experiences of Social studies teachers in using discussion methods in secondary schools by focusing on their knowledge, experiences, purposes and challenges they encounter. However, future studies need to go beyond this. The following are the areas this study proposes for further studies; there should be an investigation of teachers` perception of discussion methods to achieve cooperative learning. Another study could be done on the need for gender identity within groups of varying compositions to create gender balance in groups.

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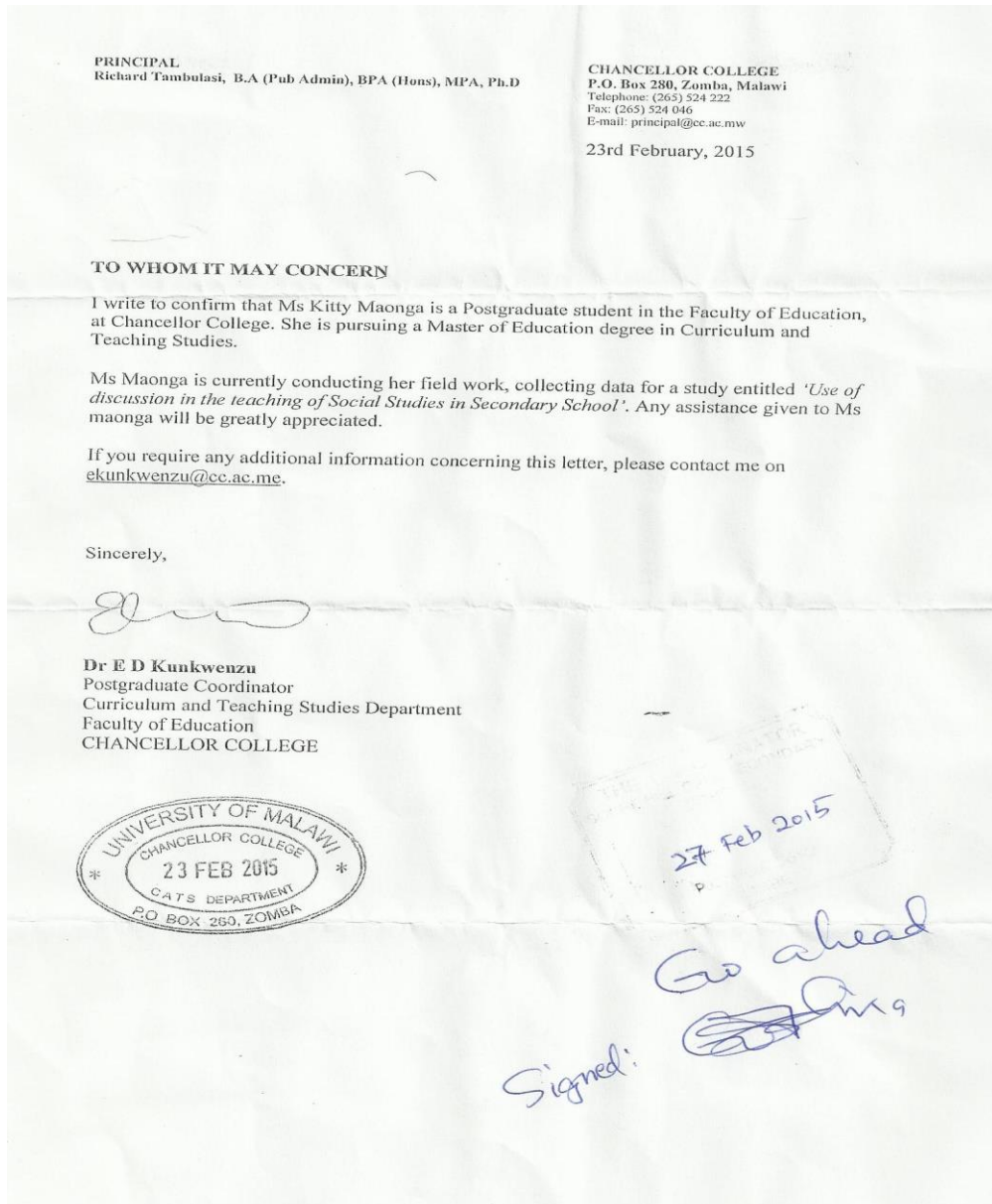
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: AN INTRODUCTORY LETTER



Appendix B: CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

Title of study: Exploring the use of discussion methods in Social studies: The case of Blantyre District

Researcher: Kitty Maonga (Student, Master of Education, Curriculum and Teaching studies, Social studies Education)

The goal of this study is to explore use of discussion methods in teaching Social studies. My interest is to carry out an investigation through observation and interviews in Social studies classrooms in order to check how it is done. The focus will be on four Social studies teachers and their classrooms. I am conducting this study in partial fulfilment of my Master of Education studies. I will use the research study to write up my thesis. I request you to participate in this study; I would also like to inform you that all interviews will be audio recorded in order to be able to keep a record that I can refer to during data analysis.

Procedure: I would like to involve you as I will be observing your lessons

Risks: There are no potential risks in this project. I will keep any information you may provide confidential. I will try to minimize any discomfort you may feel when possible.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you from the study. However, your involvement will benefit you as you will invigorate the skills in discussion. The

study will also help Social studies teachers on the use of discussion in their teaching.

Extent of Anonymity and confidentiality: For the sake of protecting your identity, your names will not be associated with the research findings in any way, only the researcher will know your identity as a participant. However, while I would take all the necessary steps to protect your identity in this study, I cannot guarantee that this would be a perfect protection since this research will be conducted in the classrooms. The lesson observation notes and the recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Freedom to withdraw: Your participation is entirely voluntary, if you may wish not to take part, do so as this will not affect your relationship with the researcher. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating.

Sign this consent form with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Any questions?

Should I continue?

Appendix C: OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

WEEK	TOPIC	METHODS
Week1		Comments
03 rd March To 07 th March,2015.	Observing teacher A Interviewing teacher A Observing teacher B Interviewing teacher B	
Week 2		Comments
10 th March To 14 th March, 2015.	Observing teacher C Interviewing teacher C Observing teacher D Interviewing teacher D	
Week 3		Comments
17 th March To 21 st March, 2015.	Observing teacher A Interviewing teacher A Observing teacher B Interviewing teacher B	
Week 4		Comments
24 th March To 28 th March, 2015.	Observing teacher C Interviewing teacher C Observing teacher D Interviewing teacher D	
Week 5		Comments

31 st March To 04 th April, 2015.	Observing teacher A Interviewing teacher A Observing teacher B Interviewing teacher B	
Week 6		Comments
07 th April To 11 th April, 2015.	Observing teacher C Interviewing teacher C Observing teacher D Interviewing teacher D	
Week 7		Comments
14 th April To 18 th April, 2015.	Observing teacher A Interviewing teacher A Observing teacher B Interviewing teacher B	
Week 8		Comments
21 st April To 25 th April, 2015.	Observing teacher C Interviewing teacher C Observing teacher D Interviewing teacher D	
Week 9		Comments

	Observing teacher A	
	Interviewing teacher A	
	Observing teacher B	
	Interviewing teacher B	
	Observing teacher C	
	Interviewing teacher C	
	Observing teacher D	
	Observing teacher D	

Appendix D: GENERAL CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

Name of School: _____

Date : _____

Time: _____

Teacher`s code: _____

Class: _____

Learning Area: _____

Number of learners in class: _____

Seating arrangement : _____

Use of Teaching and Learning materials

i.e. charts, video, information display on discussion methods

Classroom atmosphere

Teacher-pupil relationship-----

Pupil to pupil relationship-----

Learner participation

Teacher`s role

Teaching and learning process

Introduction of the concept

Teacher`s use of learner prior knowledge

Involvement of learner generation of knowledge

Teacher`s monitoring of learners` activities

Development

Stage	Teacher`s Role	Learners` Role
Introduction (1min)		
Body		
Conclusion		

Appendix E: TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Teacher Bio data

Teacher`s code: Age:

Sex: Educational Work Experience:

Qualifications:

Knowledge

What do you know about discussion as a method of teaching?

(Probe on teacher`s knowledge)

2a. In the past seven days, how often have you used it?

Type of discussion	(Tick where relevant)
Panel	
Group Discussion	
Classroom Discussion	
Debate	
Symposia	

2b. Describe how and why each of the discussion methods were used.

3. Are there any steps which you follow when using discussion methods in class?

4. Which type of discussion method do you mostly use?

5. What problems do you encounter when using discussion methods?

6. What do you like best in discussion methods?

7. How can you promote the use of discussion methods?

8. Any other experiences in using discussion methods.

Thank you for participating in the study.

Appendix F: DEBATE CHECKLIST

	Remarks
Introduction of the concept	
Division of the two groups (affirmative and the negative)	
Groups source information	
Presentation of facts	
Groups summarize facts	
Awarding of marks: clear communication, strong case, good grammar, good pronunciations.	
Any disruptive behaviour noted	
Concluding remarks	
The chairperson`s role	
Teacher`s role	

Appendix G: GROUP WORK CHECKLIST

	Remarks
Introduction of concept	
Assigning of groups	
Number of students in groups	
Roles of individuals	
Group roles	
Consolidating facts generated	
Marks awarding	
Any disruptive behaviour noted	

Appendix H: PANEL DISCUSSION CHECKLIST

	Remarks
Introduction of concept	
Assigning the panel and the audience Number of students per group	
Audience to prepare questions	
Posing questions and answering by panel	
Teacher consolidating facts	
Awarding marks to groups	
Any disruptive behaviour noted	

Appendix I: SYMPOSIUM CHECKLIST

	Remarks
Introduction of concept	
Assigning speakers	
Sourcing information	
Presentation of facts	
Consolidation of facts by the teacher	
Awarding of marks	
Any disruptive behaviour noted	
Concluding remarks	

Appendix J: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

	Remarks
Asking questions	
Collecting answers	
Learners choosing correct answers	
Giving arguments	
Teacher consolidating answers	
Any disruptive behaviour	

Appendix K: SUMMARY OF LESSON OBSERVATION

Teacher: 4 Class: 2 Time: 10:40_12:00

Date: 24th January 2015.

Topic: Physical and Emotional Changes in Adolescents

Lesson observation summary

The lesson was introduced by asking questions about the previous lesson. The teacher then introduced the day's lesson which was a continuation to the previous one. The teacher started explaining which physical changes take place in adolescents. She then asked some boys and girls to explain the physical changes that they experienced. She produced this table on the chalkboard.

Boys	Girls
Deep voice	Soft voice
Pubic hair	Pubic hair
	Rounded body
	Menstruation
	Breasts develop

Learners were told to copy the table in their notebooks.

Teacher reflection: The teacher noted that most learners at the back did not participate in the lesson instead they were making noise. Even when others were copying the table, they did not copy

Observations

Some learners sat on the floor while others sat on desks. The researcher saw this as an awkward seating arrangement.

The lesson was full of noise.

Learners brought up several ideas.

Learners who sat in front participated more than those at the back.

Further probing on why the lesson could not involve much of discussions as the learners talked about their life experiences, the teacher said she did not like grouping the learners because of the boys at the back who usually make noise and disturb others.

During post lesson interview, the teacher confessed that she did not use group work so that she can cover more content. She said group work requires a lot of time because it involves listening to one learner presenting group findings hence she would not finish the work that she prepared.

I could not use group work because I know that boys dominate in the groups so I don't like using them. If I had involved them then I would not finish the work that I prepared to teach today. You can see for yourself madam how much work I have covered without discussions. (Teacher 4: post lesson interview 24/01/15)

Appendix L: DATA

Teacher`s code: 1 Age: 34

Sex: Female Educational qualification: diploma in Education

Work experience: 3 years

TT: What do you know about discussion methods as methods of teaching?

RR: I can say that teacher and pupils talking about a topic that the teacher has presented to them. It can be before the lesson begins or during the lesson.

TT: Doyou know any types of discussion methods?

RR: No.

TT: In the past week, or the past seven days, how many times have you used discussion methods?

RR: Three times.

Types of Discussion	
Panel Discussion	
Group Discussion	
Classroom Discussion	
Debate	
Symposium	

RR: Some pupils thought it was time to play. They were making noise and others could crack jokes when giving their answers. They did not take it seriously. Sometimes when one pupil is answering a question, others would ask silly questions just to disturb the other.

They thought it was time for fun.

However, I noted that some pupils participated, they brought up serious discussions, others interacted by asking good questions to their friends. Some could explain points seriously. Most of all, I liked it when they asked each other some questions and took time to explain ideas.

After listening to the tape once more, Teacher 1 said she remembered the types of discussion methods such as group discussion, debate, and classroom discussion. She said this knowledge is from her primary school teacher training course.