Towards Harmonisation of Language Teacher Education Programmes in Malawi: An Analysis of Language Teacher Programmes[*]

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Abstract

This study aims at analysing language teacher education programmes from three secondary school teacher training institutions in Malawi. It also discusses the possibility of having a consolidated language teacher education programme for all institutions. The data were generated through document analysis of the language teacher education programmes and route maps. The data shows that the three programmes have a four-part kind of teacher programme which has courses in education foundation, teaching methodology, content and teaching practice. The courses offered are basically similar in all the three institutions with minor differences, especially in terms of the number of courses and the level at which they are offered. Considering the fact that these three institutions aim at producing teachers that will handle the secondary school English curriculum there is a possibility of having a consolidated language teacher education programme.

Keywords: Content, pedagogy, education foundations, methods

1. INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a second language in Malawi. In order to have effective and efficient teachers of English, Malawi has a number of secondary school teacher training institutions, both public and private. The role of the institutions is to equip student teachers with the relevant knowledge base and skills to effectively implement the secondary school curriculum. The student teachers are equipped with subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, which is taught in the confinements of the lecture rooms and is expected to be used in practice. Richards (2008) notes that the location of most teacher-learning in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) is either the University or teacher training institution or a school. He argues that, on the one hand, the classroom is a setting for patterns of social participation that can enhance or inhibit learning. On the other hand, learning occurs through the practice of teaching which is contingent upon the relationship with mentors, fellow novice teachers and interaction with experienced teachers in school.

In Malawi, secondary school teachers for the English language are trained in four public institutions which are University of Malawi's Chancellor College (UNIMA, CHANCO), Mzuzu University (MZUNI), Domasi College of Education (DCE) and Nalikule College of Education (NCE). Some private universities and colleges have recently been opened which are also training secondary school teachers. For example, the University of Livingstonia (UNILIA), the Catholic University of Malawi (CUNIMA), the Malawi Adventist University (MAU) and Nkhoma University (NKHUNI) just to mention some.

The secondary school teacher training programme, in general, has three levels of qualification, namely, certificate, diploma and degree. There are various channels for one to get into these programmes. Firstly, students are recruited directly from among secondary school graduates. Secondly, some students are enrolled under the upgrading scheme which caters for unqualified teachers and under-qualified teachers. Nkhokwe, Ungapembe and Furukawa (2007) define under-qualified teachers as those teachers who have a qualification lower than a diploma and the unqualified as those teachers with general diplomas and degrees. The under-qualified are recruited for a four-year degree programme at any public or private secondary school teachers training institution. The unqualified teachers go for a one-year University Certificate of Education at the institutions that offer such a programme. UNIMA (CHANCO), MZUNI and UNILIA. Those recruited from among the secondary graduates undergo a four-year degree programme on face-to-face, and a five-year programme on Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) delivery mode.

With all these teacher training institutions in Malawi one would expect a consolidated programme as each of these institutions aim to produce teachers that will be implementing the Malawi secondary school English curriculum. However, that is not the case. Each institution has its own programme and ways of implementing the curriculum. This paper therefore, aims to evaluate programmes from three different teacher training institutions and discuss the possibility of having a consolidated programme for all institutions in Malawi.

1.1   Second Language Teacher Education

Graves (2009), Johnson (2009), Richards (2008), Darling-Hammond (2006), Karakas (2012), Zengin, and Ataş-Akdemir (2020), Ünsal, & Atanur-Baskan, (2021) and Tylor, Deacon and Robson (2019) explains that a second language teacher education programme informs three broad areas. Firstly, the content of the second language (L2), secondly the pedagogies of how L2 is taught and finally how teachers learn how to teach.

Graves (2009) argues that the role of teacher education programme in the 1970s was to transmit two-part knowledge base, that is, knowledge about language, learning theories, the target culture and knowledge about methodologies and training teachers to use skills. This seems to agree with Richard's (2008) observation that there have traditionally been two strands of knowledge base within the field of SLTE. That is, one strand focusing on classroom teaching skills and pedagogic issues and the other focusing on what has been perceived as the academic underpinning of classroom skills; namely, knowledge about language and language learning. Most of the teacher education programmes in Malawi seem to have the kind of knowledge base Richards has highlighted, as the programmes offer courses in; Pure and Applied Linguistics, Methodology and Education Foundations.

Freeman (2009) claims that the teacher education programs differed for those learning to teach foreign languages or languages other than the English language and those learning to teach English as a Second Language or English as a foreign language. For, those training to teach other languages, their training included language, literature, cultural studies with some attention to classroom teaching (Schultz, 2000). On the other hand, those training to teach English learnt about language content through grammar and applied linguistics; about learning through the study of second language acquisition; and about teaching itself through classroom methodologies. Freeman's historical background still emphasises on the two strands of knowledge base, the content knowledge through SLA and the pedagogical knowledge.

The knowledge base of L2 teacher education has assumed that the disciplinary knowledge that defines what language is, how it is used, and how it is acquired that has emerged out of the disciplines of theoretical and applied linguistics is the same knowledge that teachers use to teach the L2 and that in turn, is the same knowledge that students need in order to learn (Johnson, 2009). This argument seems to agree with Darling-Hammond (2006), who argues that the dilemma that the teacher

education programs find themselves in is that many lay people and a large share of policymakers believe that almost anyone can teach reasonably well. According to Darling-Hammond, it is argued that entering teaching requires, at most, knowing something about the subject, both in proficiency in the language and knowledge about its structure (Graves, 2009) and the rest of the fairly simple "tricks of the trade" can be picked up on the job.

Contrary to the views cited by Darling-Hammond (2006), Johnson (2009) and Graves (2009), Richards (2008) argues that teaching is not simply the application of knowledge and of learned skills. It is rather "a much more complex cognitively driven process affected by the classroom context, the teacher's general and specific instructional goals, the learner's motivations and reactions to the lesson, the teachers' management of critical moments during a lesson" (p. 167). In other words, teaching of a language requires more than knowledge of the subject matter, it also requires knowledge on how this subject matter can be transferred to the learners. In view of this, the knowledge base of L2 teacher education must include disciplinary or subject knowledge that defines how language is structured, used and acquired and must also account for the context of L2 teaching. That is to, what and how language is actually taught in L2 classroom as well as teachers and students' perception of that content (Freeman & Johnson, 1998 as cited in Johnson, 2009).

The reviews that were done on teacher education programmes in South Africa (Tylor, Deacon & Robson, 2019) and in Chile (Barahoma, 2014) indicate that the teacher education programmes provide student teachers with not only knowledge about language but also how to teach the language. Barahona argues that the Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) should help student teachers develop a holistic understanding of classrooms, learners and teaching. To achieve this Chile's SLTE programmes use a hybrid model. The hybrid model used has characteristics of at least three models, Craft Model, Applied Science Model and Reflective Model. Matson, Eilersten and Rorrison (2011), views Craft Model as a model that looks at teaching as doing and looks at learning to teach as an act of imitating experienced teachers. Teaching practices is an act of introducing student teachers into the profession in this model. Applied Sciences Model views teaching as a rational and objective process and views learning to teach as the application of theory learnt at the university. This application is done through teaching practice. The Reflective Model is about knowing what to do. It emphasises on student teachers learning how to teach through reflecting on their own practice. This is done by interpreting and analysing cases in the light of research, theory and Practice.

1.2 Knowledge about language and Second Language Teacher Education

As much as the focus of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) content has shifted from what the teachers should know to the understanding of who the teachers are; what skills they have; and who their learners are; the knowledge about the language cannot be ignored as part of the knowledge base for SLTE. Wright (2002) argues that "becoming a language teacher involves a number of related processes, in particular, learning to create connections between the linguistics, or 'content' and the methodology or 'teaching', aspects of language teaching" (p. 113).

Related to the Knowledge about Language is Teacher Language Awareness (TLA). Andrews (2007) citing Thornbury (1997) defines TLA as the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively. According to Wright (2002), a linguistically aware teacher does not only understand how language works, but also understands the students' struggle with language and is sensitive to errors and other inter-language features. It is apparent from these discourses that the knowledge about language goes beyond just knowing the structure of the language, it is more to do with how the language is acquired, learnt, used, interpreted and taught. Wright (2002), Bartels (2005) and Andrews (2007) agree on the need for the teacher of second language to have some knowledge of the language that they will teach.

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According to Attardo and Brown (2005), teachers of language need to have some idea about prescriptive and descriptive grammars, language use and variation, language structure and history of English. They further argue that the teachers may not teach these aspects as part of the content, but they will use them as background in making educational decisions while teaching reading, writing and oral communication. Andrews (2007) conversely argues that the L2 teacher needs to have knowledge about language and knowledge of that language. In relation to this, Karakas (2012) and Barahona (2014) emphasise on the student teachers need for competence in the language they will teach. In the Language Teacher Education programmes that Karakas and Barahona reviewed in Turkey and Chile, respectively, there is an emphasis on student teachers' acquisition of knowledge about English and knowledge of English (competence) in the way the courses are organised. The argument being put forward is that a teacher of English should not only know how to teach English but also teach in English. Beytekin and Chipala (2015) likewise emphasise the importance of linguistic courses and contend that course work in the specific academic content area, a teacher is assigned to teach can promote teacher quality and student achievement in some subject and grade levels.

KAL and TLA indicate the importance of a teacher having content knowledge. Suffice to say that knowing who your learners are and having the skills to impart knowledge may not be enough for a teacher. The teacher needs to have knowledge of the subject content he or she is going to teach. Therefore, a course in linguistics may be very important in LTE. Bartels (2005) also argues that "armed with knowledge about the language, teachers [of English] will among other things, be able to understand and diagnose student problems better, provide better explanations and representations for aspects of language and have a clearer idea of what they are teaching" (p. 205).

1.3 Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Teacher Language Awareness

Shulman (1986) looks at Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as the knowledge that "goes beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching" (p.9). He argues that this knowledge includes the most regularly taught topics in one's subject area, the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations - in other words, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others; and an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons. That is, PCK represents "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented and adopted to the diverse interests and ability of learners and presented for instruction" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8).

PCK concerns the manner in which teachers relate their pedagogical knowledge (what they know about teaching) to their subject matter knowledge (what they know about what they teach) in the school context for the teaching of specific students (Brophy, 1991 in Andrews, 2007; Van Driel & Berry, 2010). Konig, Lammerding, Nold, Rohde, Strauß, and Tachtsoglou, (2016) look at PCK as subject-specific knowledge for the purpose of teaching. That is, teacher knowledge of the curriculum, learners' knowledge of teaching strategies and multiple representation. This is the kind of knowledge that will separate a linguist from a teacher of English. This shows that a teacher of English needs to understand English as a language, its structure, use and acquisition; needs to understand the different methodologies that can be used to teach English; needs to understand learners they are teaching and the context in which they are learning English. It is, therefore, the role of the English teacher education programmes to produce this kind of teacher.

Andrews (2007) model of PCK is an adaptation of Shulman's (1987) model. Shulman (1986) proposed three major categories of knowledge: the subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge, as earlier discussed. The categories were later extended

to seven (Shulman, 1987) and these include: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends, purpose and values and their philosophical and historical grounds.

Andrews (2007) model of PCK maintains the five out of seven Shulman categories: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, knowledge of learners, and knowledge of educational contexts. Instead of looking at Pedagogical Content Knowledge as a standalone category of knowledge, Andrews looks at it as an overarching category of knowledge that contains a number of categories of knowledge within it. This description of Pedagogical Content Knowledge by Andrews is in tandem with the description of PCK as discussed in this study. The other departure from Shulman's model is the knowledge of educational end, purpose and values which Andrews has not presented as a category of knowledge. One would argue that when one gains the knowledge of educational context and curricular knowledge one should be able to understand the purpose as well as the values of education. This could be the reason Andrews did not include it on the list.

The content knowledge as discussed in TLA and KAL reflects the teachers' knowledge of the language (strategic competence and Language competence) and teachers' knowledge about the language (subject matter cognition). As discussed earlier on, a teacher who is knowledgeable about the language does not only understand how language operates but also the kind of struggle the learners face when learning the language (Wright, 2002). This idea is reflected in the component of knowledge of learners. In this model therefore, the PCK is seen as the overarching knowledge base and TLA is seen as subset of the teachers' knowledge base (a knowledge base subset that is unique to the L2 teacher), which interacts with others and blends them in acts of expert L2 teaching (Andrews, 2007).

The literature clearly describes what the teacher education programme should have. It describes the kind of knowledge base the student teachers of second language should have by the end of their training. What might differ would be the packaging of the courses. Therefore, in this paper, the idea is to analyse the kind of knowledge base student teachers in different teacher training institutions in Malawi have. This would provide a basis for the argument that there is a need for a consolidated language teacher education programme in Malawi.

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2. METHOD

2.1 Data Generation Methods

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and through document analysis. The interviews were used to get an in-depth understanding of how the programme is designed and is implemented in the institutions. The documents that were analysed were the curriculum documents and route maps for Language Teacher Training programmes. The programme documents were analysed to understand the knowledge base of second language teacher education in the institutions.

2.2 Study Sites

Data were generated from three teacher training institutions in Malawi between February and March 2018. The first institution is the oldest private institution that trains teachers of English. The second institution is a teacher training college, the first public secondary school teacher training college in Malawi. It is affiliated to the third institution that was also part of the study. The third institution is the oldest teacher training institution in Malawi. In this paper codes, Institution A, Institution B and Institution C, have been used to identify the institutions.

2.3 Participants

The participants of the study were 11 teacher educators from the three institutions. The participants included Deans of Faculty, Heads of Department, and Heads of section, Teaching Practice

coordinators, and Lecturers responsible for English teaching Methodology. These were opted for because they were viewed as members involved in designing and implementing the programmes. Data was also generated through document analysis where curriculum documents and route maps were analysed.

2.4 Recruitment of the Participants

The participants that were involved in the study were recruited through Purposive Sampling. The study looked for participants that can provide information in language teacher education programmes. It was not difficult to identify the actual participants as in all cases there was only one member fitting a particular category.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data generated were analysed qualitatively using Thematic Analysis. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative analysis of data involves these procedures: preparing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through the process of coding, condensing the codes and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion. Thus, the interviews were transcribed and were organised in terms of the set of different interviewees involved. The data were coded and interpreted in line with themes identified through the codes. The process also involved validating the accuracy of the data information through the researcher's reflections, member check, and debriefing.

3. FINDINGS

The study established that the three institutions' programmes have four components: subject content matter, teaching methodology, Education Foundations, and Teaching Practice. The findings in this section are divided into four key areas: general education courses, subject content matter, teaching methodology and Teaching Practice. This is in line how Graves (2009), Johnson (2009), Richards (2008), and Darling-Hammond (2006) describe the teacher education programme.

3.1 General educational courses

The first component in the content of the teacher education programme in all the three education institutions were the general courses in education. In Institution A, they were called Education and Teaching Studies (ETS) and in Institution B and C, they were called Education Foundations (EDF). For institution A and B, the students started these courses in year 1 whilst in Institution C, they started the courses in year 2. The implication of this was that the student teachers in institution C were given fewer courses in Education Foundation which might mean they lacked some knowledge by the time they graduated. However, in the absence of the curriculum document for Institution C, it was difficult to say whether the students were given all the "must do" education courses. What was clear was that the students take fewer courses. The route maps indicated they took a total of 11 courses against 15 for Institution B and 16 for Institution A.

The content in the Education Foundational courses provide student teachers with general knowledge about teaching and learning. The courses include Educational Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, Counselling and Guidance, and Special Needs Education. There are also courses that initiate the students into the school environment, helping them understand the school as a place for teaching and learning and how to manage the school. These courses include: Sociology of Education and Education Administration, Leadership and Management.

3.2 English Subject Content

As much as there are differences in the combination of the teaching subjects in the three institutions, one of the subjects a student needs to take is English. The content of English in the three

institutions nevertheless differs. The content of the subject matter is in two, literature and linguistics or language.

The courses in both pure and applied linguistics give students a chance to understand how the English language works, which might make it easier to teach the subjects to learners of English as a second language. Wright (2002) argues that a linguistically aware teacher not only understands how language works, but also understands the students' struggle with language and is sensitive to errors and other inter-language features. Andrews (2007) calls this Teacher Language Awareness (TLA). This is the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying system of the language that enables them to teach effectively. This implies that the provision of linguistic courses to student teachers of English in the three programmes is an important aspect of their knowledge base. Table 1 provides a summary of the language courses offered:

Table 1. Language courses in the institutions

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C
Year 1	• Introduction to English Grammar • Introduction to Linguistics • Language and Society	• Grammar for communication • Introduction to Description of English	• Usage of English and composition
Year 2	• Psycholinguistics • Introduction to phonetics and phonology	• Discourse Analysis • Language and gender • Description of English	• Practical English usage and expression
Year 3	• Semantics • Creative writing • Pragmatics • Advanced Syntax	None	• Description of English I
Year 4	• Discourse Analysis • Advanced Phonology • Stylistics • Morphology	• Stylistics	• Description of English II

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 3 indicates the differences in the types of courses that are offered in the three institutions. In Institution A, there is much emphasis on general linguistics courses while in institutions B and C, there is much emphasis on the description of English as a language. This means that the students in Institution A gets a broader understanding of language issues while those in Institution B and C get information on a specific language, English, which is the subject they will teach. The idea of equipping student teachers with information on English is supported by what Attardo and Brown (2005) argue that teachers of language need to have some ideas about issues of prescriptive and descriptive grammars, language use and variation, language structure and the history of English. This could also be the reason why Institutions B and C have courses in Description of English. This would give the students teachers' specific content for the subject they will teach in secondary school. However, the students in Institution B and C might be lacking the understanding of the structure and use of English in relation to other languages. The broader knowledge about language structure would help the student teachers to appreciate the structure of English.

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The second component of the subject matter content is literature. There are several literature courses that equip student teachers with skills to critically analyse various genres of literature. The students are exposed to different texts in literature, and more importantly texts from Africa and Malawi in particular. The analytical skills and the knowledge of the content gained in the programme would be ideal in the teaching of literature in secondary schools. Table 2 gives a summary of the literature courses offered in the institutions of high learning in Malawi in this study.

Table 2. Literature courses offered in the institutions

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C
Year 1	• Introduction to Literature • Introduction to the African Novel	• Practical criticism • Practical drama	• Practical Criticism • Introduction to literature • Introduction to oral literature
Year 2	• The African Poetry • Malawian Literature in English	• Introduction to English Literature • Introduction to African Literature • Shakespeare	• Introduction to English literature • Introduction to African Poetry and Plays • Introduction to African Novels and Short Stories
Year 3	• Literary Theory • Shakespeare • Advanced studies in African Novel	• European Novel • African Plays in English • Malawian Literature • Literary Theory and Practice	• Malawian literature • The African Novel in English • Literary Theory I • African American Literature • Caribbean Literature • History and Principles of Literary Criticism • Malawian Oral Literature • The English Novel
Year 4	• African Oral Literature • The European novel • Caribbean literature • African American Literature	• African Novel in English • Studies in English Poetry • African Literature in the Diaspora	• Shakespeare • Studies in African Poetry • The European Novel • Literary Theory II • Currents of Thought in African Literature • English Romantic Verse • American Verse

Source: Research data, 2018

Table 2 also shows the variation in the literature courses that are offered in the three institutions. It can be seen from Table 4 that most of the courses are similar even though they come at different levels. We cannot of course ignore the fact that Institution C has many courses in Literature. As much as some of these courses are elective, the fact remains that it offers more literature courses than language courses and more literature courses than any other institution in this study. It should also be noted that Institution B has more literature courses as compared to language courses. Institution A has a balance between Literature and Linguistics. The implication of this is that student teachers from institution B and C have content knowledge that is biased towards Literature. However, literature makes up just four out of the ten core elements of English taught in secondary schools. A

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proper balance between linguistics and literature is needed in all the programmes to produce a teacher who can handle all the core elements of English.

However, in all the three institutions, what is important to note is the emphasis on literature from Africa, Shakespeare, and Malawian Literature. These are courses that directly address the content in secondary school. The texts studied might not be the same, but the student teachers are exposed to contexts they will have to deal with in secondary school. There is also an effort to cover all the four genres of literature which include the Novel, Short Story, Poetry and Drama. This is very important because as teachers of English they will be expected to teach all the four genres of literature.

3.3 Teaching Methodology Courses

The other component of the programme is the teaching methodology courses. These are the courses that introduce the student teachers to the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools. While language courses provide the academic content, the methodology courses show teachers how to teach the content (Richards, 2008). The difference between these courses and the Education Foundation courses or the Education and Teaching Studies courses, is that these are specific to the teaching of English. Table 3 is a summary of the methodology courses offered in the three institutions:

Table 3. English teaching methodology courses offered by the institutions

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C
Year 1		• Introduction to the teaching of English in secondary schools	
Year 2	• Language Education • English Teaching Methodology 1	• The teaching of English Language • The Teaching of Literature in English	
Year 3	• English Teaching Methods 2 • English teaching methods 3	• Introduction to language assessment and syllabus evaluation • Language assessment and syllabus evaluation	• Theories and approaches to language teaching • Teaching speech, grammar and literature • Language testing and evaluation • Teaching reading and writing
Year 4	• TP Evaluation	• Approaches and methods in second language teaching • Research in Language Education	• Language classroom observation and evaluation • Classroom practice in English

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 3 shows that the institutions introduce their students to methodology courses at different levels. In Institution A for example, the students are introduced to English teaching methodology courses at year 2. In Institution B, the courses start in year 1 Semester 2, while in Institution C, it is in year 3.

By looking at the content of the methodology courses, it is clear that they are designed to help the students understand the kind of content they will be expected to teach in the secondary schools. The courses also aim to help the students understand the different theories that have informed the teaching of English in schools and equip them with the skills and strategies to apply such theories in the teaching process. Basically, there are not so many differences in the content of the methodology courses that the institutions offer despite the different names given to the courses. What seems to be different is how the courses are packaged. One might argue then that this is the case because if the institutions are training teachers that will implement the same curriculum, then the training should be based on the needs of that curriculum. However, we cannot overlook the relationship that exists between Institution B and C and the influence Institution C might have on the other teacher training institutions in Malawi. On the one hand, Institution C might have influence on Institution B through their close working relationship as B is affiliated to C. On the other hand, Institution C being the oldest teacher training institution in Malawi, seem to have influence on Institution A as the majority of the curriculum developers might have been trained by Institution C.

The uniqueness of the teaching methodology courses in Institution B is the presence of a course such as the Teaching of English Literature in the teaching of literature. Whilst in Institutions A and C, the teaching of literature is embedded in the other courses. As much as Institution A starts methodology courses at year 2, they do not seem to have a special course that deals with literature.

The other unique course that Institution B has is the course in Research in Language Education. In view of the Reflective theory that informs the LTE programme at this institution, this is very commendable. This is also in agreement with Kelly and Grenfell (2004) who look at action research as an important component of language teacher education. They note that "action research encourages reflexivity and an enquiring approach and gives teachers a substantial theoretical framework for resolving difficult issues" (p. 35). Richards (2008) also observes that the coursework in areas such as reflective teaching, classroom research and action research now form parts of the core curriculum in most teacher education programmes. This means the institution has taken the right direction in terms of teacher training.

On research, as much as Institutions A and C have a component of it, the research is not specific to language education. For Institution A, the research is for general research in education and the students are free to explore studies and carry out research in Education Foundations, Language Education, Linguistics or Literature. For institution C, the students carry out research in the content areas, in this case, English. This is the reason it has been argued that Institution B has taken a right direction as research in language education will help the students understand the teaching of English better.

3.4 Teaching Practice

Van Driel and Berry (2010) observe that PCK can be promoted by addressing both pre-service teachers subject matter knowledge and their educational beliefs, in combination with providing them the opportunity to gain teaching experience and specifically to reflect on these experiences. This way, the other component of the English teacher education programmes is the TP. This gives the student teachers an opportunity to experience the actual teaching and reflect on their teaching. There are a number of practical activities that the student teachers are involved in but this section will focus on the notion of TP that requires the students to stay in school for a period of 10 to 14 weeks.

For all the three institutions, the TP is done at the end of the programme. This means by the time they go for TP they have covered all the content in the theory. In all three institutions the students spend one whole secondary school term in the schools and they are supervised by the lecturers at least four times. This gives the student teachers an opportunity to start with the students and finish with them. They have time to learn about school culture and have experience on how to teach and assess.

This experience gives the student teachers an opportunity to connect their knowledge to practice (Cabaroglu, 2014; Konig et al., 2016).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The courses in general education will help students to understand: what teaching and learning is generally about; the context in which they will teach; and the learners they are going to teach. Kelly and Grenfell (2004) indicate that teachers need to have training in ways of adapting teaching approaches to the educational context and individual needs of learners. According to Kelly and Grenfell, therefore, the Language Teacher Education (LTE) programme should help students understand the different factors that affect people's abilities to learn, and the different attitudes and cultural perspectives people bring to learning. LTE should also help students understand that adapting teaching approaches involves thinking about classroom management issues, sensitive and suitable use of materials and resources, and employing a variety of learning activities to achieve learning outcomes. In addition, LTE should help students adapt the teaching approaches for learners with special educational needs. The inclusion of these education foundation courses in the teacher education programme is a big strength to the programmes. These arguments are also supported by Karakas (2012) and whose analysis of the teacher of Education in Turkey showed that student teachers are exposed to general pedagogical issues that highlighted on the nature of learners and their learning environment.

Bartels (2005) and Freeman (2009) emphasise the need for linguistics and applied linguistics courses which are the courses that Institution A is offering to its English student teachers. Bartels just like Wright (2002) argues that armed with knowledge in linguistics and applied linguistics, teachers will among other things be able to understand and diagnose students' the problems better, provide better explanation and presentation for aspects of language and a clear idea of what they are teaching.

From the foregoing arguments, it can be concluded that the need for general linguistics courses in language teacher education can never be over emphasised. The courses give the student teachers a deeper understanding of the structure and use of the languages and how the languages are learnt. This might help the student teachers to make educational decisions on how to handle languages. It should also be acknowledged that since the institutions are training teachers of English the focus on the actual language they will be teaching, that is English, might be helpful to the would-be teachers.

Shulman (1986; 1987) and Andrews (2007) recognise subject content as an important component of the teacher knowledge base. Shulman (1986) argues that the subject matter content understanding of the teacher be at least equal to that of his or her lay colleagues, the mere subject matter major. This means that the teacher of English should have adequate knowledge of the content in English, which in the case of Malawi secondary curriculum, is the knowledge of both language and literature. The three institutions seem to provide the student teachers with the necessary knowledge of the content which they will be expected to teach. This is similar to the SLTE programme in Chile (Barahona, 2014) where students are given courses in English language and linguistics. It was observed that the content knowledge and the general pedagogical knowledge was actually privilege in the programme. These show how content knowledge is valued in the programme.

The methodology courses could be seen as courses that provide the learners with pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which Shulman (1986) looks at as knowledge beyond subject matter. This is knowledge that is unique to teachers and it combines knowledge of the content to be taught and how this knowledge can be presented to the students (Andrews, 2007; Shulman, 1987; Van Driel & Berry, 2010). The methodology courses give the student teachers an opportunity to blend the content and pedagogy to understand the teaching of English as a subject, the way it is organised, presented and

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adopted to the needs of the learners, thereby helping the student teachers develop PCK. This is the knowledge they will need to teach English in Malawian secondary schools.

However, the programmes seem to have more subject content courses than the more practical courses such as methodology courses. There seems to be more units or credit hours given to the subject content than the methodology courses. This observation was also noted in Turkey, South Africa and Chile. This could affect the development of PCK as the student teachers will not have enough time to reflect on their prior knowledge, new knowledge acquired and experience. To deal with the challenge teacher education in Turkey increased the number of methodology courses and the teaching practice was extended to cover both primary and secondary schools (Karakas, 2012). Therefore, there might be need for Malawi to follow Turkeys.

Graves (2009) looks at TP from two perspectives: classroom practice and participating in communities of practice. He looks at classroom practice on one hand, as where student teachers are given an opportunity to observe teaching, prepare for teaching, teach, reflect on it, analyse it and thus learn it or from it. On the other hand, he looks at participating in the communities of practice as a student being given the opportunity to understand why teachers are the way they are, how they are positioned in these contexts and how to develop power to negotiate and change them. The teaching practice gives them an opportunity to be involved in these two forms of practices. Cabaroglu (2014) agrees with this observation. He indicates that the field experience offers the student teachers the opportunity to learn about students, confront classroom realities, and think about the 'self' as teachers. The teaching practice coupled with a reflective seminar or work (Barahona, 2014) would give an opportunity to student teachers to learn how to teach through reflection of their own practice. Barahona argues that the conceptualisation of the knowledge base of SLTE should integrate the teacher as a learner, social contexts and the pedagogical process. This means that the teaching practice provides the student teachers an opportunity to understand the learners, the classroom and the teaching in relation to what they learnt in class.

The review of the three programmes has revealed that the programmes are similar with minor differences especially in the actual courses offered and also the levels at which certain courses are offered. The student teachers in each of the programmes are given subject content knowledge which is in two parts; linguistics and literature. Whilst Institution A has a balance between linguistics and literature, Institutions B and C seem to lean more on literature. The programmes also offer student teachers courses in general pedagogical knowledge through the Education Foundations courses. However, the difference is the level at which the courses first appear in the programme. Whilst institutions A and B start at year one, Institution C starts at year two.

Karakas (2012) argues that the knowledge base of SLTE should have content knowlege, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and support knowledge. Through the literature, linguistics and education foundation courses, the student teachers a equiped with content knowledge, general knowledge as well as support knowledge. The pedagogical content knowledge is basically acquired through the English teaching methodology courses. As observed earlier the contnet of the courses try to bring in general pedagogy and the content especially language together. This knowledge gained in the confines of the classroom is applied through teaching practice. The period and time at which students go for teaching practice does not differ in the three institutions. The similarity in the programmes shows that the institutions have basically the same knowledge base that a teacher of English in Malawi should have. The knowledge base that is similar to what Graves (2009), Johnson (2009), Richards (2008), and Darling-Hammond (2006) has described. Considering that the three institutions are producing teachers who will handle the same secondary school curriculum it is possible then to have a consolidated language teacher education programme. This will encourage collaboration between and among institutions.

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The collaboration between and among institutions would help the institutions to share resources and expertise as they work towards a common goal. The paper acknowledges the dynamics in each of the institutions as such it does not propose that the institutions have a "mirror view" of each other but should have similar credit hours for the courses offered. The institutions should also understand the kind of content courses to be offered to the teachers of English in line with the secondary curriculum and various career paths the students might want to take after graduation

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