CONTESTING SPACES IN CURRICULUM POLICY CHANGE: EXPLORING THE DUAL-MODE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI

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DECLARATION

I, MACLOUD FRANK SALANJIRA

do hereby declare that this thesis which is submitted to the university for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education) is my original work and has not been previously submitted for any degree or any other academic award at any other university, and all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of a complete reference.

This declaration was signed by me on the_____

_____

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my late father Mr. Frank Salanjira; my late bother Lawrence Salanjira; and my mother Elizabeth Majawa for being the inspiration in my life.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a phenomenological study, exploring contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode Religious Education (RE) curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi and reasons for such contestation. To facilitate a deep exploration of the central research question, four key aspects guided the study in its investigation. The first aspect foregrounded how the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood. The second explored the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change while the third focused on reasons for the contesting spaces. The fourth aspect sought to unmask the ideological underpinnings of politics of the school curriculum with regard to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

A Foucauldian concept of genealogy has been used to trace the history of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi. Another Foucauldian concept of archaeology has been used to review the discourse of RE in both local and international literature. Qualitative data were generated through a series of in-depth interviews with representatives of nine Ministry of Education officials in their role as policy-makers and bureaucrats, as well as six nationally organised faith-community leaders as stakeholders in education whose public theology influences public policy. A survey questionnaire was used to generate a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data with 54 secondary school head teachers as leaders in making curriculum decisions and choices at school level. In addition, document analysis was also used to generate qualitative data. The insights gained from this study have significance for curriculum theory and practice in general and RE curriculum theory and practice in particular.

The study extends the conceptualisation of politics of the school curriculum in general and pushes the boundaries of the debate in RE curriculum theory and practice in particular. It is argued that different people perceive the value of a curriculum differently, reflecting politics of the curriculum at an ideological level. Furthermore,

while previous studies on RE curriculum theory and practice have been based on either mono-faith or multi-faith RE, this study avails a body of knowledge based on a dual-mode RE curriculum, combining mono-faith and multi-faith RE, as part of its original contribution to knowledge. The thesis of the study is that the perceived value of a curriculum may inadvertently mask its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part One: Framing the Study within a Corpus of Local and International Literature   1

Chapter One
Introducing the Study: Orientation and Background

Chapter Two
Genealogy of Religious Education Curriculum in Malawi

Chapter Three
Archaeology of Religious Education Curriculum Theory and Practice

Chapter Four
Mapping the Analytical Route

Chapter Five
The Methodological Landscape

Part Three: First-Level Analysis and Interpretation   **172**

Chapter Six
Politics of the School Curriculum One: Opportunities of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum for Malawi

Chapter Seven
Politics of the School Curriculum Two: Weaknesses and/or Threats of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum for Malawi

Part Four: Propelling the Study into a Higher Mode of Abstraction   **261**

Chapter Eight
Deconstructing Ideological Underpinnings of Politics of the School Curriculum

Chapter Nine
Toward a Synthetical and Integrated Interpretation: Thesis and Concluding Reflections

List of Tables

List of Appendices

List of Abbreviations

ACEM	Association of Christian Educators in Malawi
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Central and Eastern Africa
ATR	African Traditional Religion
ATRs	African Tradition Religions
BK	Bible Knowledge
CCAP	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CDSS	Community Day Secondary
CEED	Central East Education Division
CWED	Central West Education Division
DEMAS	Directorate of Education Methods Advisory Services
DEP	Directorate of Education Planning
DSHE	Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
EAM	Evangelical Association of Malawi
ECM	Episcopal Conference of Malawi
EMAS	Education Methods Advisory Services
FC	Faith Community
HT	Head Teacher
JCE	Junior Certificate Education
MAM	Muslim Association of Malawi
MCC	Malawi Council of Churches
MANEB	Malawi National Examination Board
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate Education
NED	North Education Division
PRISAM	Private Secondary Schools Association of Malawi
RE	Religious Education
RI	Religious Instruction

RME	Religious and Moral Education
SDC	Seventh Day Church
SEED	South East Education Division
SHED	Shire Highlands Education Division
SWED	South West Education Division
TA	Traditional Authority
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

Part One: Framing the Study within a Corpus of Local and International Literature

Part One frames the study within Malawi's historical and socio-political context. It also locates it within a body of local and international literature on RE curriculum theory and practice.

Chapter One introduces the study with respect to its orientation and background in the context of Malawi, as well as: its rationale and motivation; research problem and focus; key research questions; my positionality as a researcher; credibility, trustworthiness and transferability of research; and an outline of thesis chapters.

Chapter Two employs a Foucauldian notion of genealogy to describe and discuss the historical development of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi, from the time the Christian missionaries introduced formal western education in the 1870s to the present.

Chapter One

Introducing the Study: Orientation and Background

Today, educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy and overt public contestation.[1]

1.1   Introduction

Maintaining peace and unity among people is an inescapable duty of any government. One strategy of achieving such a situation is through a close alignment of national curriculum policy to government's political vision (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). To that end, there is usually a close relationship between national political visions and curricula as governments endeavour to organise what is taught in schools in a way that promotes unity and peace. One of the central arguments of this study is that despite such attempts, curriculum remains a fiercely contested space, with competing influences and ideologies, reflecting politics of the school curriculum.

Many chapters in this thesis begin with a quotation that addresses a central issue of the study. For instance, the quotation at the header of this chapter highlights the public contestation of educational policy as the main concern of the entire study, with particular reference to the dual-mode Religious Education (RE) curriculum policy for secondary schools in Malawi.

In this chapter, the study is introduced by presenting its orientation and background. As a phenomenological study, within a deconstructive perspective, its core or underlying assumption is that there are contesting spaces in the understandings regarding any curriculum policy change, whose essence can be described, analysed, and deconstructed so as to expose and theorise the curriculum's perceived value and possible educational contradictions. It is from this perspective that the study has explored and illuminated the

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[1] Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004, p. 2

essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi.

The expression dual-mode RE curriculum is used in this study to denote a curriculum based on two different syllabuses: one mono-faith and the other multi-faith. It can be described as a parallel-stream RE curriculum. In the case of Malawi, it is based on Bible Knowledge (BK) and Religious and Moral Education (RME). BK is a mono-faith syllabus, with content based on the Bible as the scripture for Christianity while RME is a multi-faith syllabus, with its content drawn from Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs)[2] which represent "the three major religions of Malawi" (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. iv). It was on the perception that they are the main religious expressions that they were chosen for inclusion in the RE curriculum. These three religions have members across the whole population of Malawian citizens[3].

A mono-faith syllabus draws its content from one religion while a multi-faith syllabus draws its content from many religions (Chidester, Mitchell, Omar, & Phiri, 1994). The dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced in Malawi in 2001, at secondary school level, following the Christian faith-communities' contestation of government's policy of shifting from mono-faith to multi-faith RE in 2000[4].

The expression - *politics of the school curriculum* - is used in this study to denote attempts to contest or influence the conduct of education in the school. It is claimed that the contesting spaces reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum were, in themselves, a manifestation of politics of the school curriculum. This claim resonates with the observation that educational policies are subject to overt public contestation and considerable controversy (Olssen et al., 2004).

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[2] The preferred term now is African Religion. Two important objections are raised against the term African Traditional Religions. Firstly, the term "traditional" might imply a closed, unchanging religion, denying the dynamic nature of African Religion. Secondly, the expression ATRs refers to African Religion in the plural because of its many different beliefs and ways of worship, yet there are enough characteristics which are shared in African Religion to distinguish it from other world or primal religions. However, the term ATRs is used in this study as it appears in the RME syllabus in Malawi.

[3] To be discussed in Section 1.2

[4] This will be elaborated further in Chapter Two

Recognising that policy carries different meanings for different people from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice (Ball, 1994; Odden, 1991), this study has used perspectives of three categories of elite research participants, namely, Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities (faith-communities with national coordinating offices and members across the whole country).

Methodologically, this is a phenomenological study exploring the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum[5]. This is based on the premise that different understandings regarding the value of any curriculum policy change reflect politics of the school curriculum. In conducting this study, the assumption was that the essence of such understandings could be illuminated using the perspectives of the research participants.

Theoretically, the study describes, analyses, and theorises the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. This is done within an analytical framework of politics of the school curriculum[6]. The core assumption here is that in uncovering some of the complexities of contesting spaces in curriculum policy change, the study can offer both a particular and a general account about curriculum policy. For instance, it tells a story of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, in particular. In the process, the study illuminates some challenges faced in negotiating for educational policy in the area of RE in Malawi. In general, the study provides some answers to questions about politics of the school curriculum in terms of how and why a curriculum's value may be understood. The relevance of these questions extends beyond the specificity of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in Malawi, into the wider challenges faced in the process of negotiating change in curriculum policy, globally.

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[5] To be discussed in Chapter Five
[6] This will be elaborated further in Chapter Two

Furthermore, the study demonstrates a conceptual complexity of understanding state-produced educational policy change. While its findings indicate differences in the understandings by the research participants, its thesis has wider application. In general, some of the findings portray the opportunities of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change and others its weaknesses and/or threats for Malawi[7]. The thesis of this study, however, is that the perceived value of a curriculum may inadvertently overshadow (mask) its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value.[8] This study posits that the educational value perceived by the research participants masked the educational contradictions of the dual-mode RE curriculum (see Chapter Nine).

On educational contradictions, the study further argues that, because of accommodating two syllabuses, BK and RME, the dual-mode RE curriculum embodies two spaces with contradicting ontology, epistemology, and methodology, which negate the curriculum's educational value. I use the expression 'educational value' to denote the contribution of the dual-mode RE curriculum to the achievement of the national goals of education in Malawi (see Section Chapter Two, Section 2.5). Firstly, the term ontology is used here to denote the nature of teaching and learning religion in schools. It is argued that in the mono-faith space, RE is based on one supposedly acceptable religion while in the multi-faith space RE is based on many religions accepted as valid in their own right and space. Secondly, the term epistemology is used to denote the acquisition of knowledge about religion in schools. The argument is that RE in the mono-faith space involves acquiring knowledge of one religion only while in the multi-faith space it entails acquisition of knowledge about many religions. Thirdly, the notion of methodology is used here to refer to the approach or body of methods used in the teaching and learning of religion in schools. However, as used here, this notion has nothing to do with the design but with the conceptualisation of the study. The claim is that the mono-faith space can be conceptualised as promoting exclusivist and closed methods, whilst the multi-faith space can be conceptualised as having the potential to promote open, inclusivist and/or pluralist methods of teaching and learning religion in schools.

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[7] Further discussion in Chapters Six and Seven
[8] As postulated in Chapter Nine

Core to this study is the argument that these ontological, epistemological and methodological contradictions negate the educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum. The contradictions also create a need to reconceptualise RE curriculum for public schools in a manner that does not promote educational contradictions. As Wardekker and Miedema (2007, p. 76) observe, RE "is in need of a new interpretation and new school practices in order to remain meaningful in our present culture." In keeping with this realisation, there was a need to explore how the dual-mode RE curriculum was understood in the context of Malawi's democracy and religious diversity as well as global pluralism.

The rest of the chapter extends the orientation and background of the study. Its discussion includes the context of study in Malawi with reference to the national educational system and prevalence of religions among the people of Malawi. Thereafter, the rationale is outlined to justify the need for this study. The problem, focus and key research question of the study are subsequently discussed followed by the researcher's positionality. Issues of credibility, trustworthiness and transferability of the research are also raised, followed by an outline of thesis chapters and lastly, a chapter summary.

In the next section, I present the context of the study.

1.2   Context of the Study

The study was based on a dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, which was introduced in 2001. Malawi is found in Central Africa and was a British colony from 1891 up to 1964. During the colonial period, it was called Nyasaland but changed its name to Malawi upon gaining independence in 1964. It was the Christian missionaries who started western formal education in Malawi from the 1870s (McCracken, 2000). Their aim was to use education as a means of evangelisation (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977; King, 1984; McCracken, 2000).

As at present, Malawi is an emerging democracy, since 1994, with a liberal constitution, focusing strongly on human rights and social justice (Malawi Government, 2002). This democratic dispensation has created expectations for Malawi's education system to help learners develop knowledge and understanding, skills, values and attitudes, which will enable them to be actively involved in building a just and democratic society (Ministry of Education, 1998).

From my personal experience of Malawi, its current national educational system is divided into six administrative areas called education divisions. These are namely, North Education Division (NED), Central East Education Division (CEED), Central West Education Division (CWED), South East Education Division (SEED), South West Education Division (SEED), and Shire Highlands Education Division (SHED).The education divisions are responsible for, among other things, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of education policies in Malawi.

There are three categories of schools, both at primary and secondary level, namely, government, grant-aided, and private schools. The government schools are built, owned, and funded, by the government. The grant-aided schools are built and owned by the Christian Churches but get some aid in a form of a financial grant from the government. The grant goes towards funding part of the operations of the grant-aided schools but teachers and other resources are mainly provided by the government. The private secondary schools are built and owned by private individuals or groups as a commercial enterprise.

Furthermore, at secondary school level, the category of government schools can be further subdivided into two. On the one hand, there are those schools that are entirely built, owned, and managed by the government, described as conventional secondary schools. They cater for learners from a wider catchment (geographical) area at a district, regional, or national level. On the other hand, there are those schools built by the community with or without help from donor agencies but are funded by the government for all their operations. Such schools are described as community day secondary schools

(CDSS), and are supposed to cater for learners from a local community in which they are located. Except for a few private schools, the majority of schools in Malawi follow the curriculum formulated by the government through the Ministry of Education.

Malawi's population is currently estimated at 13.1 million (Malawi's 2008 Population and Housing Census Preliminary Report). This population is predominantly Christian, with a relatively large proportion of members of the Muslim faith-community and a relatively smaller proportion of members of African Tradition Religion. In terms of population distribution by religion, Malawi Forum (2009) observes that more than 70% of the population is Christian with the largest groups being affiliated to the Roman Catholic (RC) and the Presbyterian Church of Central Africa (CCAP) Churches.

There are also smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, Evangelicals and Seventh Day Adventists (Malawi Forum, 2009). Muslims account for about 20% of Malawi's population, the majority of which belongs to the Sunni sect (Malawi Forum, 2009). On the other hand, members of African Traditional Religions account for approximately 3% of the population (Malawi Forum, 2009). In addition, there are also smaller numbers of Hindus and Baha'is, but not quantified according to Malawi Forum (2009). Despite these differences in membership, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions are considered the main religions of Malawi (Ministry of Education, 1998). The point here is that it was in such a religiously diverse society that the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced.

The study argues that, among other things, the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum was an attempt by Malawi's government to maintain peace and unity among its people[9]. The curriculum accommodated competing demands for RE by the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. Whilst the Christian-faith communities supported the mono-faith syllabus of BK, the Muslim faith-community, like the government, wanted RME, a multi-faith syllabus, to replace BK. As a compromise, the government introduced the two syllabuses as a dual-mode RE curriculum. The policy stipulated that schools

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[9] As discussed in Chapter Two

should offer both BK and RME as optional subjects and learners wishing to study RE should choose one (O'Dala, 2001).

Thus, in the context of Malawi, this study is the first empirical exploration of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy. It is an elite policy-study, focussing on three levels of society and attempting "to capture the dynamics of policy across and between levels" (Ball, 2006, p. 17). It has used the perspectives of the Ministry of Education officials as curriculum policy-makers interested in getting policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice; head teachers as leaders in making curriculum decisions and choices at school level; and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities as stakeholders in education whose public theology has an influence on public policy in education. The study, therefore, makes a contribution to curriculum inquiry in general and RE curriculum theory and practice in particular.

The next section discusses my rationale and motivation for the study.

1.3   Rationale and Motivation

Several considerations underpinned this study, covering issues ranging from the contextual state of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi, to the academic, personal, and theoretical imperatives. First, the contextual consideration: Malawi is an emerging democracy since 1994, with a liberal constitution, focusing strongly on human rights and social justice (as discussed in Section 1.2 above). Furthermore, the national goals of education for Malawi seek, among other things, to promote a range of competencies such as greater understanding of self and others, values clarification, cultural literacy, and civil toleration of differences (Ministry of Education, 1998). Given the context, this study was undertaken to explore and theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, in line with Malawi's contextual realities as a democratic and religiously diverse society.

The second consideration was related to RE curriculum policy change in Malawi introduced in 2001. This was a change from a curriculum based on one syllabus (BK only) to a curriculum based on two syllabuses (BK and RME). Such a policy change was a reflection of Malawi's changing socio-political landscape (Ministry of Education, 1998). It was for the first time in the history of education in Malawi that schools were called upon to teach a dual-mode RE based on a mono-faith and a multi-faith syllabus (O'Dala, 2001). It is argued here that a study of this nature could also help to illuminate the theoretical construction underpinning the curriculum policy initiative (Fullan, 1993), and the difficulty of getting the policy change beyond bureaucracy (Darling-Hammond, 1998). It could also shade some light on the different meanings that policy carries for different players in society from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice (Ball, 1994; Odden, 1991).

Thus, from a phenomenological perspective, the study explored the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum , using the perspectives of the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. However, in doing this, the goal was neither to praise nor condemn such perspectives. It was simply to locate and theorise the contesting spaces within a framework of curriculum inquiry and politics of the school curriculum as well as to point toward the perceived value and educational contradictions of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Thirdly, this study also draws from Ladson-Billings and Tate's (2006) observation that education scholars can and must undertake research that speaks to the pressing public issues related to education and that education research can and must be in the public interest, constituting a possible basis for social justice, action, and policy. Thus, the study explored the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a public issue affecting Malawi's national education. To that effect, the study was timely and relevant to Malawi's debate on RE curriculum theory and practice for public education.

The fourth consideration was academic, relating to the study I did for my Master's degree on the introduction and reception of RME, as a multi-faith syllabus for secondary schools in Malawi (Salanjira, 2003). The study showed that RME was received with mixed reactions, creating considerable controversy and overt public contestation, especially among leaders of the nationally organised faith-communities. While leaders of the Muslim faith-community supported the multi-faith syllabus, leaders of the Christian faith-communities largely opposed it (Chitosi, 2000a, 2000b; Salanjira, 2003; Semu, 2000; Thyoka-Phiri, 2000). It was as a result of that controversy, that the government of Malawi introduced the dual-mode RE curriculum policy in 2001 (as discussed in Chapter 2). It was a curriculum compromise to accommodate the needs of those in support of BK and RME, respectively (Salanjira, 2003). Some of findings of this study also reflect the dual-mode RE curriculum as a politically correct compromise[10]. The argument is that this doctoral study was conducted partly as an extension of that MA study as it was my "ideological suspicion" (Segundo, 1976, p. 9) about the dual-mode RE curriculum that partly provided the impetus for the study. This suspicion entailed a questioning of, and dissatisfaction with, the status quo (Waddington, 1996a) of the ideological underpinnings and educational value of RE curriculum.

In addition, given that no study had been undertaken on the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change since its introduction in 2001, there was a need for a study to explore how such a policy change was understood besides interrogating its value and educational implications. A core assumption here was that the dual-nature of the curriculum had created two contradictory pedagogic spaces, with opposing ontology, epistemology, and methodology. The argument here is that, in a sense, the study availed me an opportunity to participate in the national debate about RE curriculum policy in Malawi. It was an attempt to heed Slattery's (2006, p. 75) observation that:

> Religion is a significant factor and often the hidden script behind many curriculum controversies…We ignore religion and theology in our curriculum conversations at our peril.

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[10] I discuss this further in Chapter Six, Sub-section 6.2.1.2.

The fifth consideration related to the silence in empirical and theoretical work in both local and international literature on RE curriculum theory and practice with regard to a dual mode RE curriculum. For instance, some studies have largely focused on the debates surrounding confessional and non-confessional pedagogy of RE (Carr, 2006; Grimmitt, 1987, 2000; Shepherd, 1984; Wood, 1984). Other scholars have focused on the opposing conceptions of RE curriculum, mainly those portraying the teaching and learning of religion in schools as a religious and an educational activity or as a sacred and secular activity (Hull, 1984, 2007; Sendor, 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Sherman, 1988; Smart, 1998). Yet some studies have tended to foreground different RE curriculum options for public education (Carr, 2006; Chidester et at., 1994; Grimmitt, 2000; Hull, 2007; Slattery, 2006; Summers & Waddington, 1996). Other studies illuminate the various approaches in the teaching of RE such as "a single-tradition approach, a multiple single-tradition approach, and a multi-tradition approach" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 19).

Furthermore, much of the RE literature was replete with theoretical studies but scanty on empirical studies about RE curriculum theory and practice. In terms of context, many of the studies were based on settings outside Africa with an emphasis on mono-faith and multi-faith RE curriculum models but little on a dual-mode RE curriculum. For instance, ter Haar (1990) writes about RE in sub-Saharan Africa with a particular focus on Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Another scholar, Waddington (1996b) writes about dual-faith education in Nigeria based on Bible Knowledge and Islamic Religious Knowledge, catering for members of the Christian and Muslim faith communities, respectively. There is also some evidence suggesting that, at one point, Kenya and Zimbabwe had adopted a dual-mode RE curriculum at high school level, comprising one mono-faith and one multi-faith syllabus, as is the case in Malawi (ter Haar, 1990).[11] However, in general, there was silence in literature on RE curriculum based on two different syllabuses, one mono-faith and the other multi-faith, such as BK and RME. This study was therefore also conducted partly to address that gap in literature besides providing an opportunity for my academic participation in the global debate about RE curriculum theory and practice. In terms of its

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[11] Some anecdotal evidence by Phiri during academic conversation carried on 3rd April, 2009 at Edgewood Campus, UKZN also indicated that these two countries had adopted a dual-mode RE curriculum at one time.

theoretical contribution, the study brings in an empirical dimension based on a dual-mode RE curriculum, using Malawi as an African context.

The sixth consideration was based on my personal professional development as a lecturer in Curriculum and Teaching Studies in Religious Education in Malawi. Since 1997, I have been actively involved in teacher education and training of RE teachers for secondary schools in Malawi. Against this background, the study was conceived as one way of enhancing my professional development and competence as a teacher-educator and scholar, by advancing my knowledge and understanding of the cutting-edge debates on RE curriculum theory and practice. As such, the study has a direct bearing on my immediate working situation. My choice of this area of study resonates with Murray's (2005, p. 18) observation that if "you have expertise, experience, and a profile in an area, then it makes sense to find your research in that area, unless you hate it with a passion." I contend that my desire to explore the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change partly stemmed from a particular point in my career. As Denscombe (2002, p. 34) observes:

> As far as social research is concerned, decisions about what to investigate frequently reflect the personal interests of the researcher. Particularly with small-scale research, it is evident that past and present *personal experiences*, good and bad, often act as a major influence on the choice of topic. They can generate the incentive to investigate specific things rather than others.

The seventh consideration was in relation to the theoretical foundation or rationalisation underpinning the dual-mode RE curriculum. As each curriculum is expected to be underpinned by a theory of education (Fullan, 1993), the study also intended to interrogate and destabilise that theoretical foundation and propose a theoretical construction that should inform RE curriculum theory and practice appropriate for a democratic and pluralistic society like Malawi. To this end, the study has the potential to enhance the existing knowledge in RE curriculum inquiry. Furthermore, the study could be of benefit to both professional educators and administrators within the education system in Malawi and globally. Thus, it could help in developing and improving the

provision of RE suitable for Malawi's educational needs. It is, therefore, timely for the current debate about RE curriculum in Malawi while taking cognizance of the global debate on RE curriculum theory and practice.

The last consideration was the need for a multi-level approach to the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Some studies on policy in general (Edwards, Fitz, & Whitty, 1989; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1993) have used a multi-level approach to trace the development, formation and realisation of policies from the context of influence, through policy text production, to practices and outcomes. Ball (1994) describes this approach as a policy trajectory perspective. In the main, it "attends to the ways in which policies evolve, change and decay through time and space and their incoherence" (Ball, 2006, p. 17). This notion is developed in Chapter Two where a genealogy of RE in Malawi is discussed. It has also been used to explore how policy can be understood at different levels by different people using the perspectives of Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders.

One policy theorist, Taylor (1997), describes policy-making and implementation as processes taking place within spaces of contestation over meaning. This understanding has been employed in this study to theorise the various meanings that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change had for the three categories of elite participants. As a phenomenological study, it illuminates the essence of such meanings (Sarantakos, 2005).

Another theorist, Yeatman (1990), describes contestation over the meanings of policy as politics of discourse. This notion is used in representing and theorising the research findings within the framework of politics of the school curriculum. As discussed in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, the different voices of the research participants represent the contesting spaces in curriculum policy change.

The next section states the research problem.

1.4   Stating the Research Problem

The problem with which this study was concerned related to the apparent educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum. The contradictions were, apparently, created by two different spaces of RE: the mono-faith space represented by the BK syllabus and the multi-faith space represented by the RME syllabus. Each space has a different ontology, epistemology and methodology of RE. In general, RME as a multi-faith syllabus can create a discursive space in which dialogue across difference can be cultivated. It is argued in this study that although the BK syllabus, can be taught in an educationally acceptable way, it may find it difficult to promote dialogue across difference because of its mono-faith space and exclusion of other religions[12].

Thus, the mono-faith and multi-faith spaces create contradictions in terms of the aims of education that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy seeks to achieve. These contradictions create a problematic situation about the role of RE in the public schools. The term public school is used here to denote schools funded by the state and open to all learners. Here, McNeil (2006, p. 220) describes a public school as:

> a school publicly open to all (with exceptions), paid for by public funds, and serving the public interests by making the community a better place in which to live (civic order and preparation for a new economy).

Furthermore, the study has problematised the dual-mode RE curriculum, drawing on the notion by some philosophers of education that the inclusion of any subject in the school curriculum must be justified on educational grounds (Barrow & Woods, 1995; Hirst, 1974, 1984; Hirst & Peters, 1970; Winch & Gingell, 1999). This notion implies that each subject must make a unique and worthwhile contribution to the fulfillment of the aims of education, by fostering in learners the development of critical thinking and understanding as well as initiating learners into worthwhile and unique modes of thought (Hirst & Peters, 1970). In the words of McNeil (2006, p. 220) any school subject should contribute to "making the community a better place in which to live". However, this contribution

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[12] See Chapter Two

excludes education-like activities such as indoctrination, instruction and training as well as preaching and conditioning (Barrow & Woods, 1995). The claim here is that public schools should espouse the ethos of social justice and unity in diversity. With this understanding, it is argued in this study that, the dual-mode RE curriculum lacks a sound justification on educational grounds, although the research participants' voices do not problematise this, as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

One of the assumptions of the study was that the contradictions of the dual-mode RE curriculum had the effect of minimising its educational value. On this assumption, the findings of the study indicate that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change represents a case where the perceived educational value of a curriculum inadvertently masks its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value. The claim is that the dual-mode RE curriculum can be justified more on political than educational grounds. Politically, it can be seen as serving government's need of promoting peace and unity among people of different religious ideologies, convictions and interests, at the cost of creating educational contradictions, through its different spaces of BK and RME. It was, partly, in view of this problematic situation that I felt there was need for a fine-grained exploratory study of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Based on the research findings, the central argument of this study is that the essence of the contesting spaces tended to foreground the educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change without acknowledging its educational contradictions while its political value was glossed over. Yet the curriculum seems to be more politically than educationally correct. This observation has matured into the thesis of the study which posits that the perceived value of any curriculum may inadvertently smokescreen (mask) its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value.[13]

In the next section, I discuss the focus of the study.

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[13] As theorised in Chapter Nine, Section 9.2

1.5   Focus of the Study

The focus of the study was the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, using the perspectives of Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers (principals) and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities. The term 'contesting spaces' in this study, refers to points of disagreement about the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum. The aim was to illuminate the essence of such contesting spaces within the overarching theoretical framework of politics of the school curriculum.

The next section presents the key research question and related critical aspects explored in the study.

1.6   Key Research Question

Having considered the relevant and significant scholarly opinions and debates associated with the area of RE curriculum theory and practice, I found it worthwhile to conduct a phenomenological research, exploring contesting spaces in the way the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood. This exploration was done based on the following central research question: What was the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi? To facilitate a deep exploration of the central research question, four key aspects guided the study in its investigation. The first aspect foregrounded how the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood. The second explored the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change while the third focused on reasons for the contesting spaces. The fourth aspect sought to unmask the ideological underpinnings of politics of the school curriculum with regard to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Fowler (1995, p. 2) describes a good research question, from a quantitative perspective, as one "that produces answers that are reliable and valid measures of something we want

to measure". My claim is that, from a qualitative perspective, one can describe a good question as one that produces credible and trustworthy answers to something we want to explore. While issues of validity, reliability and generalisability are critical for quantitative studies, it is the issues of credibility, trustworthiness and transferability[14], which are central to qualitative studies (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). Thus, as a qualitative study, the above key research question was designed to elicit data by exploring, not measuring, subjective states of the research participants with regard to their understandings about the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi.

In the next section, I present my positionality as a researcher.

1.7   The Researcher's Positionality

To demarcate my understanding regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change from the understandings of the research participants, a description of my position as a researcher is made here. Positionality in research is crucial in influencing how one looks at a phenomenon under study. Patton (1990) describes positionality as a form of self-reflection and self-examination which allows the researchers to gain clarity from their own preconceptions. Thus, it would be in order here to put my core assumptions upfront. The assumptions reflect my personal biases and preferences with regard to the teaching of religion in public schools serving a democratic and religiously diverse society. My first assumption was that different people always seek to influence the conduct of education in the school depending on their ideologies (Apple, 2008, 2004; Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2006). As such, the dual-mode RE curriculum was a reflection of certain ideologies that reflect a theoretical construction underpinning the curriculum policy change (Fullan, 1993, 2007). The second assumption was that any curriculum policy change has contesting spaces reflecting people's disagreements about its perceived value. The third was that different understandings and disagreements about curriculum policy change can render any curriculum a hotly contested space (Kelly, 1999), and

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[14] See Section 1.8

difficult to get beyond bureaucracy into practice (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Above all, the different understandings and disagreements reflect politics of the school curriculum.

Furthermore, as a scholar in RE curriculum theory and practice, I strongly subscribe to the non-confessional approach of RE (Carr, 2007). This approach aims at helping learners to develop a critical knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon, without leading them to a confession of, and a commitment, to any particular faith. It is opposed to the confessional or dogmatic approach (Chidester et al., 1994; Shepherd, 1984; Slattery, 2006; Smart, 1984, 1998). It conceptualises the teaching of religion in public schools as an educational, not religious, activity (Hull, 1984). Thus, as a teacher-educator involved in training and developing students to teach RE in secondary schools, my responsibility has entailed helping students understand RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi and within a global context; but with an inclination towards RE as educational activity. This inclination runs through the thesis, informing the overarching theoretical and methodological posturing of the study.

One central inclination is that RE should be taught in public schools using a non-confessional and multi-faith approach for it to be relevant in a democratic and pluralistic society. This, however, does not mean that mono-faith RE cannot be non-confessional but that, in a religiously diverse society, it privileges one faith over other faiths. This is because public schools serve learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. As such, religion should be approached as a human phenomenon and the goal should be to understand what it means to be religious within the various faith-traditions. To this end, RE should be empirical and not dogmatic or confessional. Confessional RE should be the sphere of religious organisations and families, and it is their duty to teach the children to be religious if they so wish.

Another personal inclination is that it is the duty of a public school to teach children about the religions of the world and what they mean to their followers. Thus, the school is a vital space for the society to prepare children to live in harmony with people of other cultures and faiths. Understanding a religion does not mean acceptance, endorsement or

support. It means respect for others and an open mind (Steyn, 2004). Thus, as a Christian with a background of an educator at secondary school, college of education, and university level, my position is that public schools should be discursive spaces for promoting dialogue across difference in a multi-faith and pluralistic society. My argument is that RE is well positioned to contribute in a unique way toward this educational goal.

Furthermore, my various spaces of work as an educator have also informed my positionality in this study. I worked as a secondary school teacher from 1988 to 1996; as a lecturer at Domasi College of Education from 1997 to 2005; and as a lecturer at the University of Malawi from 2005 to the present. In all these spaces of work, I have found myself at the centre of efforts aimed at helping learners understand the debates, issues, and trends in RE curriculum theory and practice. Critical to these efforts was the curriculum change in 2001, from RE based on one syllabus to RE based on two syllabuses: one mono-faith and the other multi-faith in nature. This, to me, was a case of curriculum assumptions speaking to each other at cross-purposes.

Finally, the history of RE in Malawi also affected my posturing in this study. Prior to 2000, RE in Malawi was taught in secondary schools based on a mono-faith syllabus called BK. This meant the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001 had implications for teacher education and training in RE. For the first time in the history of education in Malawi, RE in secondary schools was to be based on two different syllabuses namely, BK and RME. While the national curriculum documents do not use the expression 'dual-mode RE', what is recommended in them is a parallel-stream RE curriculum, where BK and RME are to be taught as optional subjects. This is what is described in this study as a dual-mode RE curriculum. Thus, it is the existence of the dual-mode RE curriculum that inspired me to undertake this study as my academic contribution to the discourse on RE curriculum theory and practice. Issues of credibility, trustworthiness and transferability of the study are discussed in the next section.

1.8   Credibility, Trustworthiness and Transferability of the Study

In the discourse of qualitative research, issues of credibility, dependability and transferability are critical in evaluating research just as issues of validity, reliability and generalisability are in the discourse of quantitative research (Lodico et al., 2006). This section discusses some research aspects that make this study credible, trustworthy and transferable given its contextual, methodological and theoretical limitations.

Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon under study match up with the researcher's portrayal of them in the research report (Lodico et al., 2006). This aspect has been attended to by using research methods that have yielded thick descriptions of the research setting and participants' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum (see Chapter Five).

Furthermore, multiple sources of data (Lodico et al., 2006) have been used to ensure a broad representation of contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Through *triangulation*, different sources of data have been compared to corroborate the conclusions of study (see Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight). In that comparison, possible reasons for conflicting information have been discussed. *Negative case analysis* (Lodico et al., 2006) has also been done by examining the data for examples that contradict or disconfirm the thesis of the study. Effort has also been made to seek out and present a balanced view of all the possible perspectives reflected in the different voices of the research participants.

In general, an attempt has been made to enhance the credibility of the study by ensuring that the research findings are grounded in the data, and by staying close to the data from an empathic position (Terre-Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Furthermore, a clear connection has been made between each finding (theme) and its supporting data extracts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes have been presented in a manner appropriate to the data with all interpretations and conclusions supported by the data as well as literature. Effort has been made also to minimise my personal biases through a thick description of the research findings.

Trustworthiness (dependability) "refers to whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data" (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 275). Due cognizance has been given to this aspect by providing a detailed explanation of how data production and analysis were done. An extensive explanation of the procedures, processes and methods has been made in Chapter Five while an empirical research-based report of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi has been represented in Chapters Six and Seven.

Transferability "refers to the degree of similarity between the research site and other sites as judged by the reader" (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 275). Although qualitative research findings cannot be generalised to other settings, it is possible that lessons learned in one setting can be useful in other similar settings. That is described as transferability of the research findings from one setting to another similar setting. It is argued here that such transferability is possible through a rich and detailed description of the context and phenomenon under study. This thick description allows for *particularisation* or "coming to know the particularity of a case" (Stake, 1995, p. 39). However, insights gained from the particularity of a case or context can be transferred to similar cases or contexts (Lodico et al., 2006). This is, therefore, for readers to make. The study has provided a thick description of the research findings within Malawi's historical and socio-political context. In particular, Chapter Two has given a genealogical analysis of RE in Malawi to provide a framework within which the contesting spaces have been analysed and theorised.

The next section describes the structure of the thesis.

1.9   Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises nine chapters divided into four main parts. Part One consists of the first two chapters and frames the study within a historical and socio-political context of Malawi. Part Two comprises of three chapters. Chapters Three and Four push the study into a wider theoretical and conceptual mode, by surveying a landscape of both local and international literature on RE curriculum theory and practice. Chapter Five provides a

methodological landscape of the study. Part Three presents a first-level analysis and interpretation of the research findings, within the overarching theory of politics of the school curriculum, and comprises Chapters Six and Seven. Part Four is comprised of Chapters Eight and Nine and propels the study into a higher mode of abstraction in which the research findings are deconstructed and theorised, and where the thesis of the study is postulated. A synopsis of the chapter contents outlining the main aspects of the study is provided below:

Chapter One introduces the study by discussing its orientation and background, and describes the context, rationale and motivation of the study, as well as the research problem, focus and key research question. Thereafter, the researcher's positionality is discussed, foregrounding the researcher's biases, preferences and core assumptions. This is followed by a discussion of the issues of *credibility, trustworthiness* and *transferability* of the research findings, ending with an outline of the thesis chapters.

Chapter Two borrows from a Foucauldian notion of *genealogy* to discuss a trajectory of RE curriculum policy and practice and foreground the importance of history for curriculum negotiation, formulation and implementation. It traces the changes in RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi and outlines a socio-political and historical context of the dual-mode RE curriculum.

Chapter Three borrows from another Foucauldian concept of *archaeology* to configure a broader terrain of curriculum theory and practice in RE within which the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi is contextualised. The issues, trends, and debates in the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice are foregrounded with the dual-mode RE curriculum represented as an emerging dimension within that discourse.

Chapter Four maps out a theoretical and conceptual route of the study, through a discussion of an eclectic analytical tool-box, employed to theorise the research findings. The discussion foregrounds an overarching theory of politics of the school curriculum,

supplemented by three concepts, namely: policy change, public theology of religions, confessional and non-confessional RE. Through these lenses, the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum are theorised as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

C*hapter Five* discusses the research design, methodology and methods used in the study. Within an interpretive paradigm and a general phenomenological perspective, it discusses first the data-production process before proceeding to data-analysis process. The discussion focuses on the following methodological issues: phenomenology, research participants and sampling, data production and analysis process, piloting the study, methodological limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapters Six and *Seven* present a first-level analysis and interpretation of the research findings. This is done within a framework of politics of the school curriculum as discussed in Chapter Four. The findings are based on data generated with the three elite categories of research participants, comprising representatives of nine Ministry of Education offices as curriculum policy-makers, 54 secondary school head teachers as leaders in making curriculum decisions at school level, and representatives of six nationally organised faith-community leaders as stakeholders in education whose public theology influences public policy. More specifically, Chapter Six represents contesting spaces in curriculum policy change portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum as a space of opportunities and Chapter Seven as a space of weaknesses and/or threats represents for Malawi.

Chapter Eight pushes the analysis and interpretation into a higher mode of abstraction and theorisation. Employing a deconstructive approach, it unmasks the ideological assumptions underpinning politics of the school curriculum as reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. It foregrounds public theology of religions, confessional and non-confessional RE, policy change, and hegemony in the dual-mode RE curriculum. The chapter problematises the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy

change and interrogates the curriculum's perceived value in view of its contradictory spaces of mono-faith and multi-faith RE.

Chapter Nine presents a synthetical and integrated interpretation of the study, within the overarching framework of politics of the school curriculum. The thesis of the study is postulated by positing that the perceived value of a curriculum may overshadow its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value. It argues that while the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change have foregrounded the curriculum's perceived educational value, (in terms of its opportunities as well as weaknesses and/or threats), the curriculum's political value and educational contradictions are overshadowed. Thereafter, the chapter synthesises the essence of the contesting spaces followed by recommendations and areas for further study while ending with some concluding reflections.

A summary of Chapter One is presented in the next section.

1.10   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the study has been introduced and justified, foregrounding the context, rationale and motivation, research problem, focus and key research question of the study. A discussion of the researcher's positionality and issues of *credibility*, *trustworthiness* and *transferability* of the study have been acknowledged. Lastly, a synopsis of each of the chapter contents has been outlined.

In the next chapter, a literature review on the history of RE in Malawi is provided. The aim is to configure a historical and socio-political background of the dual-mode the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Chapter Two

Genealogy of Religious Education Curriculum in Malawi

Historically, moves and counter-moves to define curriculum have occurred within highly contested terrain[15].

2.1   Introduction

The notion of *genealogy*[16] is used here to explain the changes that have taken place in the history of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi, some possible reasons for such changes and the power structures shaping the changes. In some modern societies, the role of religion in education may not be easily noticeable, yet for centuries, throughout the world, education was the domain of religion (Chidester et al., 1994; Hull, 1984). During that period, religious leaders assumed the responsibility for formal education in society within their religious settings. Through that formal schooling, learners acquired "valued cultural information, absorbed sacred and secular knowledge, and developed specialized skills, including skills in reading, writing, and thinking" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 51).

Furthermore, for the faith-communities, education was a means of promoting their respective faiths. To that effect, education was a handmaiden of religion; a way of evangelising, aimed at initiating the learners into a particular faith or strengthening their faith. This was no exception for the Christian missionaries who introduced western formal education in other parts of Africa (King, 1984; Nwosu, 1984; van Den Berge) and Malawi in particular (Banda, 1982; McCracken, 2000; Nankwenya, 1977). However, with the rise of modern, secular states, the provision of formal schooling is largely the responsibility of government. Such separation of role between religion and government has somehow weakened the influence of religion in education. This chapter argues that despite their weakening influence, faith-communities still continue to impact on the shaping of educational policy in one way or another. This study illuminates some of the influence that faith-communities continue to exert on education, using the context of

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[15] Cary, 2006, p. xi
[16] To be discussed in Section 2.2

RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi. The major concern of this chapter is to configure a history of RE in Malawi as a framework within which to explore the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. This resonates with the opening quotation of this chapter that "Historically, moves and counter-moves to define curriculum have occurred within highly contested terrain (Cary, 2006, p. xi). In view of this, the chapter locates the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change within its historical and socio-political context. Central to such a framework is "a conception of policy as a politically, socially and historically contextualised practice" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 3). This contextualisation illuminates the assertion that attempts to conceptualise curriculum do occur in a highly contested terrain (Cary, 2006).

Borrowing from Foucault's (1972) notion of *genealogy*, the chapter discusses a historical trajectory of RE in Malawi from the time Christian missionaries introduced formal schooling to the present, when secondary schools have a dual-mode RE curriculum. The discussion includes a description of genealogical analysis as conceptualised by Foucault (1972). This is followed by an outline of the history of RE in Malawi, tracing hegemony in the school curriculum, from the 1870s to 2001. This historical outline places particular emphasis on RE under the Christian missionary control from 1875 to 1926 before proceeding to RE under the colonial government control from 1926 to1964. Thereafter, a discussion is given of RE after Malawi's independence from 1964 to 2001, including the shift from mono-faith to multi-faith RE in the 1980s. Then, the dual-mode RE curriculum is discussed as a battleground of competing influences and ideologies. This is followed by a critical discussion of the complexity of the curriculum negotiation process that led to the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum. Lastly, the chapter illuminates some of the contradictions between the dual-mode RE curriculum and some of Malawi's national goals of education. In the following section I explain the concept of genealogy and its relevance to the history of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi's education system.

2.2   Genealogical Analysis

The concept of *genealogy* (Foucault, 1972) is used in this study to trace a history of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi's education system. *Genealogy* is a Foucauldian notion concerned with tracing "the historical process of descent and emergence by which a given thought system or process comes into being and is subsequently transformed" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 45). To use Vincent's (1995, p. 187) description, genealogy "exposes the motives, pressures and power underlying our supposed rationality." The supposed rationality is a given thought system or process (Olssen et al., 2004) in any field of knowledge. For Foucault (1972), all sciences and disciplines, thought systems or processes, are discursive formations, reflecting particular ways of thinking. These discursive formations "are shown to be congealed sets of preconceptual, unrationalized elements which constitute a society's regime of truth" (Vincent, 1995, p. 187). *Genealogy* seeks to expose that regime of truth. It is with this understanding that the notion of *genealogy* is used in this study. The goal is to trace a historical process by which RE started and has subsequently changed in Malawi. Thus, as Olssen et al (2004, p. 47) explain it, genealogical analysis:

> aims to explain the existence of transformation of elements of theoretical knowledge (*savior*) by situating them within power structures and by tracing their descent and emergence in the context of history.

For the purposes of this study, a genealogical approach is employed, starting from the 1870s, when 'western' formal education was introduced by the Christian missionaries, through the colonial period (1891-1964) and post-colonial period (post-1964), to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi in 2001. This periodisation is deliberate, intended to give a historical framework within which to describe, analyse and theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi.

Furthermore, genealogical analysis is employed here to illuminate and trace hegemony in RE curriculum theory and practice as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

Commenting on the importance of understanding the setting of a social phenomenon under study, Grace (1995, p. 3) argues that:

> Many contemporary problems and crises in education are, in themselves, the surface manifestations of deeper historical, structural and ideological contradictions in educational policy.

It is claimed that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is, in itself, a manifestation of deeper historical, structural and ideological contradictions in RE curriculum policy in Malawi. Such contradictions are embedded in the mono-faith and multi-faith curriculum spaces. Thus, the study recognises the importance of a historical and socio-political context in the construction of knowledge about any social phenomenon. As Slattery (2006, p. 66) observes, the "meaning of events cannot be separated from their context, just as the knower cannot be separated from the known". Similarly, the meaning of the dual-mode RE curriculum cannot be separated from its Malawian context.

In addition, central to this chapter is the conception of policy as politically, socially and historically contextualised (Olssen et al., 2004). With this conception, I have configured the history of RE in Malawi for two main reasons: first, to illuminate hegemony in RE curriculum policy as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum, and second, to theorise the present dual-mode RE curriculum policy change and the way it was understood by the research participants as a manifestation of hegemony in formal schooling.

Another crucial role of genealogical analysis for this study is its contribution in overcoming the criticism of "rampant ahistoricism" (Ball, 2006, p.18) in education policy research. Through it, I have avoided downplaying the impact of a socio-historical context in constraining or enabling meanings and actions (Thompson, 1990). As Ball (2006) observes, in practice, most educational research lacks any sense of time and one most obvious aspect of that neglect is a rampant ahistoricism. This criticism is against presenting research findings on policy without taking into account the historical realities informing the phenomenon under study. The argument here is that, considering a

historical background helps to deliver a sense of the processes of policy reform and change. It is a form of context-building, providing a bigger picture through which readers are given a good vantage point of the research findings for them to render their critiques (Ball, 2006). Context-building enables readers to have a perspective from which to judge the observations being made by the researcher regarding the data (Constas, 1992). Thus, this chapter provides a framework within which the theoretical, conceptual and methodological issues raised in this study should be understood.

One scholarly opinion in the discourse of policy studies is that policy change can be approached from the perspectives of policy scholarship and policy science (Ball, 2006; Fay, 1975; Grace, 1996). For instance, Grace (1995, p. 3) elaborates this dichotomy as follows:

> Policy scholarship resists the tendency of policy science to abstract problems from the relational settings by insisting that the problem can only be understood in the complexity of those relations. In particular, it represents a view that a social-historical approach to research can illuminate the cultural and ideological struggles in which schooling is located…Whereas policy science excludes ideological and value conflicts as 'externalities beyond its remit…

The study draws heavily on the notion of policy scholarship to illuminate the values and beliefs informing contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. I argue that this curriculum reflects some cultural and ideological struggles within the context of schooling in Malawi.

In addition, in constructing the historical and socio-political framework, the study draws heavily on documentary sources[17]. Primary sources used include minutes on RE curriculum consultation meetings by The Ministry of Education and faith-communities; the circular letter on the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change; BK and RME syllabuses; and Malawi's Education Act. Secondary sources used include newspaper articles commenting on the controversy that arose because of the introduction

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[17] As discussed in Chapter Five, Section 5.4.2

of the multi-faith syllabus in 2000; the Phelps-Stokes Commission Report; local and international books on RE and education in general. The argument here is that this historical analysis is done as a prelude to an exploration and theorisation of the research findings represented from Chapter Six through to Chapter Nine.

Furthermore, drawing on Lawton's (1980) notion that politics of the school curriculum relates to the distribution of knowledge in society and the decision-making involved, the history of RE in Malawi has been analysed to illuminate what the politics of teaching religion in schools has been. The substantial claim is that RE in Malawi has been marked by hegemony of the Christian faith over other faiths. That hegemony continues in the dual-mode RE curriculum, though in a modified form, influenced by Malawi's history of education in general and of RE in particular.

What follows is a genealogical analysis and discussion of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi. The assertions made are a result of a summary of literature review of RE in Malawi.

2.2.1   Hegemony in Religious Education in Malawi: 1875-2001

The notion of hegemony is used here to denote domination of one faith-community over other faith-communities in the teaching of religion in schools. This entails RE based on one faith at the exclusion of other faiths or giving a privileged space in the RE curriculum to one faith over other faiths. It is argued that hegemony can be detected in the way RE has been conceptualised and practised in schools in Malawi. Furthermore, hegemony can also be a useful tool in developing an understanding of the complexity of the process of curriculum negotiation as reflected in the various understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum represented in Chapters Six and Seven.

Slattery (2006, p. 66) observes that "all interpreting and bracketing of events must be directed toward a synthetical, integrated understanding". Drawing from this view, this study argues that the interpreting and bracketing of the dual-mode RE curriculum must be

directed toward a synthetical, integrated understanding of hegemony in Malawi's formal education system. The substantive claim of this section is that the dual-mode RE curriculum, based on BK and RME, is rooted in the history of education in Malawi. The legacy of the Christian missionary work in education continues to impact the present dual-mode RE curriculum policy. From the 1870s up to late 1980s, the Christian faith enjoyed hegemony by excluding other faiths in the RE curriculum. Even the present dual-mode RE curriculum reflects continued hegemony by giving a privileged space to the Christian faith. Christian faith-communities' demand for mono-faith RE manifests their unwillingness to allow other faiths equal space in the school curriculum.

Taylor et al (1997) observe that there is always a history of significant events that happen in society in terms of particular ideological and political climate as well as particular groups and individuals. These events together influence the shape and timing of policies, their evolution and consequences (Taylor et al., 1997). For Foucault (1972), such events influence and shape the historical process of descent and emergence of any body of knowledge or discursive formation. Borrowing from this view, this section argues that the historical background and socio-political context of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy reflects the domination of the RE curriculum space by one faith at the exclusion of other faiths. This domination is not accidental but reflective of the ideological political posturing of the stakeholders in education at each given point in time. In the case of the dual-mode RE curriculum, Taylor's (1977) view is important for one to have a perspective of the ideological and political climate informing the contesting spaces in the understandings by the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders.

Furthermore, the desire to dominate in one way or another has the potential to lead to contestation in any sphere of life (Fairclough, 1995; Gramsci, 1971). This is no exception in the field of curriculum theory and practice commonly described as a hotly contested space (Apple, 2008, 2004; Kelly, 1999). Contestation can be noticed over what it means to teach RE in public schools. Foucault (1980) argues that meaning is constructed in historically contested social domains. This section argues that the various understandings

regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change illuminate the various meanings constructed by the research participants within Malawi's historically contested social domain and can also be informed by hegemony.

Furthermore, a genealogy of RE in Malawi illuminates what has been taken to be the theory and practice at certain times from the 1870s to the present situation where Malawi has a dual-mode RE curriculum policy. A fundamental issue is the way in which the school context has been organised or constructed over time to include or exclude certain forms of knowledge and understanding in RE. Such inclusion or exclusion can be deconstructed to illuminate hegemony in education. It is argued in this study that deconstructing a historical context of any curriculum is vital for understanding the theory and practice of any subject in the school. Furthermore, as Kliebard (1992, p. 158) puts it, deconstructing a history of a curriculum "is significant not just in a pedagogical sense but in terms of status attainment and social relations, if not social justice". It illuminates who is privileged and who is not by that curriculum. This notion is applied in Chapter Eight where assumptions underpinning the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum have been deconstructed to unmask the privileged space and some of the ideologies informing politics of the school curriculum.

The genealogy of RE in Malawi illuminates a trajectory in which the curriculum has changed from being confessional and mono-faith to non-confessional and mono-faith;   to non-confessional and multi-faith; and further, to a dual-mode RE curriculum based on BK (mono-faith syllabus) and RME (multi-faith syllabus). It also exposes and destabilises exclusivism in the history of RE in Malawi.

From a social justice perspective, it can be argued that the policy of exclusivism in RE curriculum has had negative impact on some members of the Muslim faith-community in Malawi. Some Muslims opted not to attend the Christian mission schools for fear of conversion to the Christian faith (Chakanza, 2000). Consequently, they lagged behind in western education and its associated benefits (Chidester et al., 1994).

Thus, the dual-mode RE curriculum, with its educational contradictions, constitutes one of the contemporary problems in RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi and also globally. Beyond this, the dual-mode RE curriculum can also be seen as a surface manifestation of "deeper historical, structural and ideological contradictions in educational policy" (Grace, 1995, p. 3) in Malawi. It can also be argued that, to some extent, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy contradicts Malawi's national goals of education, especially those seeking to promote citizenship, ethical and socio-cultural skills, among learners in a democratic and pluralistic society (as discussed in Section 2.5 below).

In the next sub-section, the genealogy of RE is discussed. This is done within a time frame when formal western education was offered only by the Christian missionaries in Malawi.

2.2.2   Religious Education under Christian Missionary Control: 1875-1926

The roots of western formal education in Malawi predate the colonial rule, which started in 1891 when the British government declared Malawi (formerly known as Nyasaland) a British Protectorate (McCracken, 2000). The first formal schools offering western education in Malawi were mission schools by the Christian missionaries from the 1870s. The missionaries established schools mainly as agents of evangelisation (Banda, 1982; McCracken, 2000; Nankwenya, 1977). In that sense, RE was an important subject in the enterprise of evangelisation. Apart from evangelisation, schools taught the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic and also carpentry and other practical subjects (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977). Thus, the roots of formal western education in Malawi shaped and influenced the development of RE curriculum theory and practice as a discursive formation (Foucault, 1972, 1980).

Although the British colonial rule started in 1891 (McCracken, 2000), the colonial government did not become involved in the provision and coordination of education until 1926 (Banda, 1982). It is for this reason that I have chosen to describe the period from

1875 to 1926 the era of education under Christian missionary control. During this period, many, if not all, Christian missions saw schools as places of spreading the Christian faith. Thus, RE was an important subject, which was known by various names such as Religious Knowledge, Religious Instruction, Christian Education, Religion, and Scripture (Nankwenya, 1977; Salanjira, 2003). During that period, RE was not a discursive space for promoting dialogue across religious differences. This was because the goal was to lead the learners to a confession of, and commitment to, the Christian faith. RE was, therefore, confessional and exclusivist in character.

Furthermore, RE was a compulsory subject in the mission schools (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977). More specifically, learners were expected to become members of the Christian denomination whose school they attended. The teaching of RE was denominational and Bible-based, with emphasis on the doctrinal teachings of each particular denomination (Nankwenya, 1977). Thus, conversion of the learners to the denominational belief system and rules constituted a fundamental aspect of the RE curriculum theory and practice in the various mission schools. This was a case of *denominationalism in education* - offering education according to needs and doctrines of each Christian denomination. As was the case in most parts of the colonial world, the mission schools "aimed at inculcating a Christian life and worldview in the consciousness"(van Den Berge, 1984, p. 13) of the learners.

Another feature of denominationalism in education was that the teachers in the mission schools had to be committed and respected church members or converts (Banda, 1982). Those who failed to live up to the high standards expected of them lost their membership and job (Nankwenya, 1977). It was assumed that parents who sent their children to the mission schools agreed to the religious initiation of their children into the Christian faith or knew that their children would be initiated into the Christian faith by virtue of attending the mission schools (Nankwenya, 1977). The problem was that those parents who belonged to a different religion or Christian denomination found it difficult to educate their children in schools of another religion or denomination. This had a negative effect on access to education for some children (Chakanza, 2000).

In the context of Malawi, it can be argued that denominationalism in education was especially a big problem for Muslim parents bearing in mind that western education was being offered in Christian mission schools only. The choice for the parents was either to keep their children committed to Islam by keeping them away from the mission schools or send them to the mission schools and face the likelihood of conversion to Christianity. For some committed Muslim parents, the choice was obvious: keeping their children away from the mission schools. In some instances, Muslim chiefs even went to the extent of refusing permission for the building of mission schools in their areas or simply ignored the mission schools, if there were any (Chakanza, 2000).

Even after the colonial government had created The Department of Education in 1926 to set standards and get rid of denominationalism in schools (Banda, 1982), Muslims in Malawi still felt uncomfortable with the Christian mission schools because of confessional RE. This had a negative social impact: "Many Muslim children… had been alienated from public education because of the presence of Christian instruction and Bible Knowledge in the school curriculum" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 85).

In the next sub-section, I discuss the genealogy of RE within the general aims of missionary education. This illuminates the educational ideologies of the Christian-faith communities in their enterprise of evangelisation.

2.2.3   Religious Education Curriculum within the General Aims of Christian Mission Education

This sub-section further applies Foucault's (1972) notion of historical development of any discursive formation to illuminate the shaping of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi. This has the effect of avoiding the criticism of ahistoricism with regard to RE. It is argued here that from 1875 to 1926, each Christian mission in Malawi defined its own aims of education for the Africans in accordance with its ideals (Nankwenya, 1977). The missions also defined the principles under which the educational aims were to be

achieved. It was common that where the aims and principles coincided among the missions, as was generally the case, emphasis in approach and methods, at least, differed (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977). For instance, all the Christian missions agreed on the significance of civilisation and industrial training for Africans and attempted to achieve these goals in their curriculum (Nankwenya, 1977). However, the Dutch Reformed Church Mission, Livingstonia Mission, and Blantyre Mission were closer to achieving their goals of industrial training than the Anglican and Roman Catholic Missions who placed great emphasis on religious instruction and catechesis (Banda, 1982; Lewis, 1962).

Thus, the general aims of the Christian mission schools were almost similar for each mission. Their common aim was to establish missions that were supposed to introduce evangelical and civilising work, since they came in as civilisers as well as preachers (Nankwenya, 1977). This meant that they were concerned with the many sided aspects of African society for the spiritual, industrial, social and political uplift of a person as a whole (Nankwenya, 1977).

Furthermore, Nankwenya (1977) and Banda (1982) observe that it was the general view of all the Christian missions in the country that education and Christianity were closely linked. Education was to serve Christianity by educating people who would help in spreading the gospel. To this end, the aims of mission education were interpreted within the primary scheme of missionary work whose centerpiece was upholding the name of Jesus and spreading the Gospel (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977). For instance, the prime objective of the Protestant Christian missionaries was evangelisation that entailed teaching people the gospel of Christ and getting them to accept and confess him as their personal savior (Nankwenya, 1977). It was also a great tradition of Protestant Christianity that people should learn more of God's will for themselves by reading the Bible (Nankwenya, 1977). To that effect, the first objective in making people literate was to enable them read the Bible, especially the Gospels. As was the case in many parts of Africa, this form of literacy among the converts was important because it was felt that

those who could read the Bible could be used to expound the scriptures to others (King, 1984; Nankwenya, 1977; Nwosu, 1984).

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic missionaries did not subscribe to the Protestant method of letting people read and interpret the Bible on their own (Nankwenya, 1977). For them, the Bible needed to be interpreted by a priest to the laity. Thus, reading the Bible was not a main feature of RE curriculum theory and practice in Catholic mission schools, but catechism. This pedagogic practice involved indoctrination into the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church (Nankwenya, 1977).

In terms of education in general, some Christian missionaries felt that their African converts were simple people for whom more sophisticated ways of life and ideas were quite unsuitable and would be disturbing (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977). They, therefore, advocated education that would purify the African ways of life but keep them simple. Their missionary concern was to make education a means to an evangelical end (Nankwenya, 1977). It was, however, realised that people must live in this world for the present and in order to live in accordance with Christian standards, they must have steady occupations (Banda, 1982).

Thus, the missionary understanding then was that idleness leads to vice, hence the emphasis on practical training and work. This emphasis, consequently, led to mission education with two main aspects: religious and practical education (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977). The main aim of this education was to lead the converts to steady sober ways of living. Character development based on religion was the colouring of every mission educational activity (Banda, 1982). Thus, RE was justified on evangelical and moral grounds. It was a means of promoting the Christian faith and moral/character development, based on Christian values, among the learners. The next sub-section discusses and illuminates the notion of exclusivism in RE and how it affected the development of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi.

2.2.4   Classic and Progressive Exclusivism in Religious Education

From the time the Christian missionaries started introducing formal schooling, throughout the whole colonial and post-colonial period, up to the late 1980s, Malawi's RE curriculum theory and practice were informed by a mono-faith or single-faith approach. One principal feature of this approach was the teaching of one religion or faith at the exclusion of other faiths. This meant that the curriculum involved teaching and learning of religious content drawn from Christianity only. Since the purpose was to promote the Christian faith among the learners, a confessional pedagogy was appropriate and inevitable.

Thus, to meet their ideological ends, the faith-communities adopted a confessional approach to RE (Carr, 2007), aimed at leading the learners to a confession of, and commitment to, a particular faith. This was true in many parts of the world where the Christian missionaries went to spread the word of God. Commenting on RE in Africa, King (1984) observes that, in many African countries, the teaching of religion in schools during the period of colonial rule was controlled by Christian missions and churches. It was denominational church education aimed at producing committed church members. Even in the few government schools, learners were usually divided according to their denominations for Religious Instruction classes where outsiders from the churches would come to teach (King, 1984).

Furthermore, exclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum by the Christian missionaries was inevitable, given the pedagogic value of their schools. This study has described such exclusion as 'classic exclusivism'. It was practised by the various Christian mission schools at a time education was entirely under their control, without any government supervision. On the other hand, the expression 'progressive exclusivism' is used to describe the continued exclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum offered under the coordination of the government, serving public schools in a pluralistic society, with learners coming from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. It is argued in this chapter that the roots of exclusivism in RE within Malawi's education

system can be traced to the time formal education was entirely under the control of the Christian missionaries, through the colonial to the post-colonial period.

Another insight is that through exclusivism, the mono-faith and confessional approach to RE disadvantaged those who belonged to different faith-communities or denominations. In Foucault's (1972) words, it can be argued that exclusivism influenced and shaped the conduct of RE in schools. The learners had either to convert to that denomination or miss formal western education altogether. Muslim parents who did not want to expose their children to the likelihood of converting to Christianity opted to keep their children away from the Christian schools. Where opportunities were available, they sent their children to Qur'anic schools called Madrassas where they learned Islam and the Qur'an (Chakanza, 2000). As a result, members of the Muslim faith-community tended to lag behind in formal western education (Chidester, et al., 1994).

In the next section, the genealogy of RE during the time when the British colonial government had taken supervision of education from the Christian missionaries, is explored.

2.3   Religious Education under the Colonial Government Control: 1926-1964

Although Malawi became a British protectorate in 1891, the colonial government did not become actively involved in the provision of education until 1926 when the first Department of Education was established (Banda, 1962). Firstly, the department came into being partly following the recommendations by the Phelps-Stokes Commission (Lewis, 1962). In the context of Malawi, this commission came in the wake of the Chilembwe uprising of 1915 against the British colonial rule. One of its recommendations was for government supervision and coordination of education that up to1926 had been in the hands of the missionaries for over forty years. Another recommendation supported the type of RE offered by the Roman Catholic Church, where the reading and interpretation of the Bible was controlled and done by the clergy. This

was different from the free reading and interpretation of Bible promoted by the protestant churches which had the potential to produce radical African Christians like John Chilembwe (Lewis, 1962; Nankwenya, 1977). Chilembwe was one the early Malawians who got educated under the influence of Joseph Booth (McCracken, 2000).

Secondly, The Department of Education was established partly due to the increasing demand for education by Africans. In the context of very limited resources, the missionaries, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, realised the need for government to take charge of education in the country. For a long time, the Christian missions had been left on their own to struggle with the provision of formal schooling without definite guidance from the government (Banda, 1982). Thus, the newly formed Department of Education was charged with the responsibility of coordinating and supervising formal education which was mostly offered by the various Christian faith-communities.

Banda (1982) observes that with the coming in of government control and supervision, a new understanding of education arose. Prior to that, learners had to be taught with the view of converting them to Christianity and also producing teachers among them who would work as agents of evangelisation. According to Banda (1982), this view changed and people began to think of education of a person for something wider than only the immediate needs of the missions. Education was now viewed as total preparation of individuals for their own good for them to live meaningful lives in society (Banda, 1982).

However, one can argue here that this view seems to be over-simplistic about the ideological position of the government in relation to that of the Christian missions. For one thing, the government wanted a type of education that would produce citizens obedient to the government, for easy control and governance. That was why the preferred approach to education in general and RE in particular was the method by the Roman Catholic Church (Lewis, 1962, Nankwenya, 1977). The Protestant Churches were perceived to offer education that did not prepare the Africans for their simple African life. Instead, it produced critical minds with the potential to question and disobey the colonial masters, as was reflected in the Chilembwe uprising (McCracken, 2000).

Furthermore, with The Department of Education in place, denominationalism in education was discouraged (Banda, 1982). Learners could now attend any Christian mission school without being required to belong to the denomination whose school they attended. Prior to that learners were expected to convert to the denomination or their parents were supposed to be members of that denomination (Chakanza, 2000). Thus, in a way, the coming in of control by the colonial government increased the possibility of learners belonging to other denominations or religions to access formal education in the schools owned by different Christian denominations. For instance, Muslim children could attend schooling in the Christian mission schools without being required to convert to Christianity. Similarly, children of one Christian denomination would attend schools owned by different Christian denominations without being expected to convert to such denominations.

The difference in ideological positions between the colonial government and the Christian missions was also reflected in the fact that the missionaries resented government control that interfered with their mission aims (Banda, 1982). For them, what they wanted was financial assistance from the government to help in the running of the schools (Banda, 1982). It was because of that financial grant that the mission schools became known as grant-aided. However, because of ideological differences, the Christian faith-communities reluctantly submitted to the educational requirements set by The Department of Education from 1926 (Banda, 1982).

One observation here is that even under the control by The Department of Education, RE continued to be based on Christianity (Banda, 1982). It is argued in this chapter that such a situation represented a case of progressive exclusivism in RE by which the school provided a privileged space for the Christian faith to be taught to the learners. Within that privileged space, Christianity exercised hegemony over other religions. Thus, Islam and African Traditional Religions were excluded from the curriculum despite their strong presence in Malawi.

Commenting on the impact of the mono-faith approach, Chidester et al (1994, p. 85) observe that:

> As a result, Muslim students tended to lag behind in receiving the benefits of a general education. Although increasing numbers of Muslim students were attending government schools, many Muslim parents remained suspicious of the role of Christian instruction in the curriculum. In addition to educational grounds, therefore, Malawian educators had pressing social reasons for revising the role of religion in public education for a religiously plural society.

Thus, hegemony in the RE curriculum can be traced to the time the Christian missionaries started establishing schools in the 1870s, a trend that continued through the colonial and post-colonial period. Thus, the history of RE can help to theorise the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The policy change in 2001 was, in a sense, a reflection of politics of the school curriculum in which the Christian faith-communities liked to maintain the privileged space enjoyed by Christianity in the school curriculum. Their argument was that "Churches establish schools to teach the Bible, and therefore, the Bible cannot just be replaced any how" (Minutes of the first consultative meeting on junior secondary school Religious and Moral Education held on 20th March 2000).

In this section the genealogy of RE in Malawi when education was under the supervision of the British colonial government has been discussed. In the next section, I explore the shaping of RE curriculum theory and practice after independence from the British colonial rule.

2.4   Religious Education after Malawi's Independence: 1964-2001

After independence in 1964, Malawi's Educational Act determined the design and content of the RE curriculum and little has changed in this Act since then. RE continued to be mono-faith and Bible-based. From 1964, there was a parallel existence of teaching religion for evangelical reasons known as Religious Instruction (RI) and teaching religion for educational purposes known as Religious Education (Grimmitt, 2000; Hull,

2007, Summers & Waddington, 1996)) or Religion Education (Chidester et al., 1994; Steyn, 2004).

RI involved each denomination sending their member to the school to instruct learners in matters of faith according to their denominational doctrines. Furthermore, some anecdotal evidence[18] suggests that although RI targeted learners as members of a particular denomination, there was a possibility of converting learners from other denominations or faiths. On the other hand, RE involved the teaching of religion as an academic subject and was taught by teachers paid by the government in the school. This parallel existence reflects what Hull (1984) describes as a conception of teaching religion as a religious and educational activity. It was a deliberate arrangement meant to accommodate the faith-communities' needs to evangelise among the learners and is still observed now in schools in Malawi. It also reflects ideological differences, about the value and purpose of teaching religion in schools, between the government and faith-communities.

The next sub-section discusses some curriculum changes that commenced in the 1980s in East and Central Africa, to illuminate their impact on the development of RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi.

2.4.1 The Multi-Faith Religious Education Movement in East and Central Africa

In the 1980s, a general trend, characterised by a shift from mono-faith to multi-faith RE in RE curriculum theory and practice, was evident. Some countries in eastern, central, and southern Africa began to consult on how to improve the quality of RE in public schools. For instance, the Association for Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa [AMECEA] organised consultations in RE curriculum theory and practice. The aim was to help the Churches in their effort to cooperate with the Ministries of Education in exploring "various ways and means of implementing adequate skills in teaching

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[18] During my secondary school education and as an educator at various secondary schools in Malawi, I witnessed some students converting from one faith or Christian denomination to another as a result of RI.

Religious Education so as to sustain the interest of both teachers and students" (Phiri, 1988, p. 35).

The countries involved included Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana (Phiri, 1987, 1988). One of the agreed recommendations was that RE should emphasise the teaching of religion as an educational, not religious, activity in public schools. These consultations led to the beginning of curricular policy change, in some countries, from mono-faith to multi-faith RE, and Malawi was no exception.

I have described this trend as the 'multi-faith RE movement' to emphasis its push for a change in RE curriculum theory and practice from mono-faith to multi-faith. Commenting on this movement, ter Haar (1990) observes that on both national and international level, regular consultations were being held to discuss the future of religious education in African Schools.

The initial meeting of this movement was held in 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya. The focus was on curriculum design in general and distinguishing faith education or confessional RE in the churches from non-confessional RE in the schools (Phiri, 1987). A second meeting was again held in Nairobi in 1982. Its area of emphasis was "moral education in primary schools" (Phiri, 1987, p. 33). In 1983 a third meeting was held in Lusaka, Zambia, focusing on African values and their place in RE (Phiri, 1987). A fourth consultation meeting was held in 1987 in Harare, Zimbabwe, attended by delegates from Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. For instance, delegates form Malawi included Sister Gertrude Tenthani of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, Gibson Kazembe of the Malawi Council of Churches (then Christian Council of Malawi) and Isabel A. Phiri from the University of Malawi (Phiri, 1987).

In the next sub-section, I discuss the commencement of the multi-faith RE in Malawi as part of a genealogical analysis of RE curriculum theory and practice.

2.4.1.1 The Beginning of Multi-Faith Religious Education in Malawi

The multi-faith RE movement of the 1980s in East and Central Africa had an impact on RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi. One of the notable changes was the review of the teacher's guides for primary school RE (Phiri, 1988). To upgrade the standards of RE in primary schools and teacher training colleges, The Ministry of Education in conjunction with The University of Malawi embarked on a two-year programme of training tutors for the teacher training colleges. The first cohort of students completed its training in December 1985 (Phiri, 1987). These teachers were immediately deployed in the field, charged with the task of implementing a multi-faith RE curriculum (Phiri, 1987).

However, the actual curriculum implementation of the policy change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE did not commence until 1987. Teacher training colleges adopted a multi-faith RE curriculum based on Malawi's three main religious traditions namely, Christianity, Islam, and Malawian traditional religions[19]. This multi-faith RE started in teacher training colleges as a preparation for its introduction in primary schools where it started in 1991 with standard (grade) one learners (Ministry of Education, 1991).

To facilitate a smooth RE curricular transition for the learners graduating from primary to secondary schools[20], a multi-faith RE syllabus was introduced in secondary schools in the year 2000 under the name Religious and Moral Education (RME). It was intended to replace the former mono-faith syllabus called Bible Knowledge (BK). All secondary school learners were expected to study this subject since it was part of the core curriculum (Salanjira, 2003). A core curriculum refers to all those prescribed learning areas or experiences that all learners are supposed to undergo in all schools. It is the opposite of an elective curriculum which has prescribed learning areas or experiences that are not compulsory but optional for each school to offer and for each learner to choose what to study or not . Thus, a new feature was that whilst previously RE, based on BK,

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[19] A term used for the various forms of African Religion in Malawi.
[20] Primary education in Malawi has a span of eight years while secondary education has a span of four years

had been an elective subject, RME was prescribed as a core subject. It can be observed here that multi-faith RE can contribute to "the project to educate citizens and create democratic schools in a free society" (Banks, 2007, p. xii). Education in a democratic and pluralistic society should help learners to acquire not only the content but also the values and skills needed to know reflectively, to care deeply, and to act thoughtfully (Banks, 2008).

The introduction of this multi-faith syllabus at secondary school level got mixed reactions from the society. Leaders of nationally organised faith-communities in Malawi were notable in resisting that change. More specifically, the multi-faith RE policy created controversy and contestation among leaders of the Christian and Muslim faith-communities as stakeholders in education and the Ministry of Education as policy-makers. Consequently, the government of Malawi was forced to suspend the implementation of RME in 2000. Instead, the government called for national consultations among stakeholders to come up with a curriculum compromise. After almost a year of deliberations on the issue, the government announced a change of the RE curriculum policy in May 2001[21].

It is important to understand this change in RE curriculum theory and practice within Malawi's socio-political context. In 1994 Malawi underwent a political change from one-party dictatorship to multi-party democracy. That change brought in, among other things, the concepts of respect for human rights and good governance. Consequently, human rights issues affected and penetrated curriculum development work and principles. In turn, the content of the school curriculum in general became an issue for debate in a democratic dispensation. As is reflected in some of the findings in Chapter Seven, the timing of curriculum change under a Muslim head of state was perceived to have contributed to the debate and contestation about the curriculum change.

The new political dispensation, with its attendant emerging issues, further justified curriculum change to uphold freedom of conscience, religious belief, thought and

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[21] To be further elaborated in Section 2.4.1.

academic freedom (Malawi Government, 2002). In 1995, a national symposium on education was organised to come up with a vision for a secondary school curriculum appropriate for the new era. It was agreed that the new curriculum had to address emerging issues such as moral decay and environmental degradation. It had to equip learners with skills, values, attitudes, knowledge and understanding that would enable them to become effective and positive citizens in a multi-faith and pluralistic society (Ministry of Education, 1998). Among other things, the symposium endorsed, in principle, a multi-faith RE curriculum for secondary schools as one of the subjects to be included in the new curriculum (Salanjira, 2003).

Thus, following the change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE at primary school level, coupled with the changes introduced by the new political dispensation, the secondary school curriculum review started. Like the primary school RE curriculum, the secondary school RE curriculum had also to change from mono-faith to multi-faith. However, because of the emphasis placed on addressing moral decay among the youth, it was decided that moral issues should be highlighted in the new RE curriculum (Salanjira, 2003). That affected its name. Thus, while at primary school level the curriculum was simply called Religious Education, the secondary school curriculum was called Religious and Moral Education (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Both the primary and secondary school multi-faith RE curricula were based on Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, with a component on moral issues (Ministry of Education, 1991, 1998). However, at primary school, the teaching of moral issues did not start in standard one but two up to standard eight. The emphasis, in the primary school RE curriculum, was on highlighting the differences between Church Education and Religious Education (Ministry of Education, 1991). It is argued here that such a curricular change was in line with the pluralistic nature of our contemporary society.

Justifying multi-faith RE in the context of religious diversity, Slattery (2006, p. 83) suggests that:

> Curriculum development in the postmodern era must include…
> autobiographical testimonies of many people from all religions,
> spiritualities, and cultures to help us understand - not convert or condemn
> - the rich diversity of our community.

The above quotation shows that there are many curriculum imperatives that can influence and shape the emergence and descent (Foucault, 1972) of RE. Such imperatives may also shape and influence the way in which RE curriculum policy is understood by different players from the point of conception to the point of implementation (Ball, 2006). Thus, drawing from Slattery (2006), the argument here is that given the plurality of our contemporary society, the prime concern of RE curriculum theory and practice should be informing, not evangelising, the learners. RE should be "meaningfully connected to current events, life experiences, and personal autobiographies" (Slattery, 2006, p. 86) of the learners. The religious diversity of our current society should inform any RE curriculum. Purpel (1989; 2005), a curriculum scholar, contends that the moral and spiritual crises in society must be the forefront of curriculum studies, and postmodern schooling must attend to these important issues. It can be argued that the RME syllabus was an attempt to respond to the spiritual and moral realities of our contemporary society in the context of Malawi's three main religious traditions, namely, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (Ministry of Education, 1998).

One observation here is that the change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE in Malawi was part of a general secondary education curriculum review. Its rationale is contained in the 1985-1995 Education Development Plan (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. i), and reads in part as follows:

> The secondary education curriculum became out of date because of the
> socio-economic and political changes that have taken place since
> independence. The present curriculum is out of tune with the emerging
> issues such as overpopulation, gender, environment degradation,
> HIV/AIDS related diseases and civics education which affect the socio-
> economic development of the country. The review of the primary
> education curriculum has also made the review of the secondary education
> curriculum necessary.

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The study argues that the multi-faith RE curriculum was an attempt to make the RE relevant to Malawi's social and political context. Its introduction had gone without any resistance in primary teacher-training colleges in 1987 and at primary school level in 1991. However, its extension to the secondary school level in 2000 was hotly contested by the Christian faith-communities. The contestation was reported in one of the newspapers called The *Nation* (Chitosi, 2000b, p. 1) as follows:

> A high level meeting of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) and Malawi Council of Churches (MCM) held yesterday in Lilongwe unanimously supported the suspension of Moral and Religious Studies (MRE), a multi-faith subject, and recommended the retention of Bible Knowledge in schools until consultations are exhausted.

The reason given by the Christian faith-communities for their contestation of the multi-faith RE curriculum was that it was introduced without consultations. The *Nation* Newspaper (Chitosi, 2000b, p. 1) quoted a joint statement issued by the Christian faith-communities which read in part as follows:

> Therefore the representatives of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi and Malawi Council of Churches made the following recommendations that the current syllabus, namely Bible Knowledge, be upheld in secondary schools and the proposed religious education for primary schools which was introduced without consultation be withdrawn and religious education previously taught be upheld.

The demand here was for The Ministry of Education to withdraw the multi-faith RE from schools at both primary and secondary education level. This led to a controversy in which the Muslim faith-community supported multi-faith RE whilst the Christian faith-communities demanded its removal from the school curriculum in favour of BK as mono-faith RE.

A national consultative committee (O'Dala, 2001) was instituted under a presidential directive to resolve the controversy over the multi-faith curriculum. Following the consultations, The Ministry of Education felt obliged to change its policy of replacing the mono-faith with a multi-faith RE in secondary schools. A dual-mode RE curriculum

policy was introduced based on BK and RME as optional subjects. A circular letter by The Ministry of Education (O'Dala, 2001, pp. 2-3) sent to various stakeholders announced the curriculum policy change as follows:

> You may wish to recall that there was a directive to withhold the implementation of Junior Secondary School Religious and Moral Education Syllabus. The directive further recommended the formation of a National Consultative Committee, comprising of all stakeholders involved in the teaching of religious education in secondary schools in the country, to deliberate on the introduction of the new Religious and Moral Education (RME), which was to replace Bible Knowledge (BK) according to the new Junior Secondary Curriculum. This directive was made in response to complaints from some religious organisations that they were not consulted when the decision to introduce Religious and Moral Education and remove Bible Knowledge was made.

> I am pleased to inform you that the consultative committee finally resolved that a revised Religious and Moral Education and a revised Bible Knowledge be offered as optional subjects in government, grant-aided and private schools and that all schools shall observe the right of the student/learner and/or indeed of his/her parent to choose the religious instruction subject of his/her choice as provided by the Republic of Malawi and the Education Act…

> Head teachers are strongly advised not to force any pupil to study any of these subjects without consent of the pupil….I should be very grateful if the contents of this letter will be made known to all members of staff and pupils.

This circular letter was addressed to the stakeholders in Education in Malawi.[22] It officially marked the beginning of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. Thus, instead of having a core multi-faith syllabus replacing the former mono-faith syllabus as previously planned, the new curriculum provided for RE based on BK and RME. Schools were expected to offer both syllabuses as optional subjects.

Copies of this circular letter were sent to all nationally organised Christian and Muslim faith-communities, all the six Education Divisions in Malawi, all government, grant-

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[22] See Appendix 9

aided, community-day, and private, secondary schools, and other stakeholders in education (O'Dala, 2001). However, not many schools have adopted the policy. Christian faith-communities have continued to resist RME in favour of BK. On the other hand, the Muslim faith-community has shown preference for RME to BK, creating contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Thus, in essence, the dual-mode RE curriculum came into effect as a compromise. The policy change successfully finessed the controversy by creating two spaces of RE: one mono-faith and the other multi-faith.

However, a question that can be posed here is: why did the Christian faith-communities not contest the multi-faith curriculum when it was introduced in primary teacher-training colleges in 1987 and primary schools in 1991 but did so when The Ministry of Education extended the initiative to secondary education level in 2000? A possible reason could be that they were not aware of the change then. However, documentary evidence clearly shows that the faith-communities were, not only aware of, but familiar with, the change. They had even participated in the curriculum consultations that led to the adoption of the multi-faith curriculum initiative (Chidester et al., 1994; Phiri, 1987, 1988; Salanjira, 2003). Another possible reason could be that although the Christian faith-communities had participated in the consultations, they did not agree with the proposed RE curriculum change. If that was the case, then they had failed to express that concern during the consultative discussions. All the same, this still begs the question: why did they resist in the year 2000?

The political history of Malawi can offer an answer. From independence in 1964 up to 1994, Malawi had been under one-party dictatorship that repressed any contestation of government policy. People with different views were labelled political enemies or dissidents. Under that atmosphere, it was probably difficult for the Christian faith-communities to contest the government policy of changing from mono-faith to multi-faith RE. Thus, although the multi-faith RE initiative was not in line with their preference for a

mono-faith and confessional approach,[23] the Christian faith-communities were not free to express their resistance then. For one thing, resistance would have been deemed as socially divisive in the midst of government's efforts at promoting national unity among people of diverse faith orientations. So, it can be argued that, they kept silent for fear of political repression.

However, Malawi's one-party dictatorship came to an end in 1994 when a new government based on principles of multi-party democracy came to power. The change of government ushered in a new era of freedom, promoting principles of human rights and social justice. But, even with that change of government, the Christian faith-communities did not come out to contest the multi-faith RE curriculum that was introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A possible reason here could be that probably resistance was difficult for them just after the democratic government came to power in 1994. Doing so then would have probably been seen as violating the principles of democracy and social justice. It would have meant denying other faiths space in the school curriculum.

It can be argued, however, that the Christian faith-communities found it easier to contest the extension of the multi-faith RE curriculum to secondary school level in 2000 on the premise of lack of consultation by The Ministry of Education. Another possible reason could be that probably the Christian faith-communities had forgotten about the issue but were reminded about it with the introduction of RME in 2000. Whatever the reason for the contestation, the introduction was in line with the multi-faith curriculum reform that had already started at primary teacher-training colleges and primary schools. The spokesperson of The Ministry of Education justified the extension in the *Nation* newspaper (Semu, 2000, p. 3) as follows:

> the move is an ongoing process, started in primary school some time back
> and has now been elevated to secondary school.

Whilst contestation is inevitable in any curriculum policy change due to different ideological positions of social actors who press their demands upon the school (Glatthorn

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[23] This approach is discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.2

et al., 2006; Kelly, 1999), the resistance to the multi-faith RE curriculum policy change was in some way influenced by the history of education in Malawi. It reflected an instance where government educational ideologies were in conflict with those of the Christian faith-communities as important stakeholders in education. Whereas the government was in search of RE suitable for Malawi's pluralist and multi-faith society, the Christian faith-communities wanted RE that served their religious agenda - the promotion of faith.

Furthermore, the position of the Christian faith-communities could be a reflection of conservatism. As observed by Hatcher and Jones (2006, p. 338) in their social movement theory, "Conservatism is hardly surprising: in many fields social movements wish to hold on to what they see as the gains of the past". The field of education is no different. That is why even after changing from mono-faith to multi-faith RE curriculum in primary school teacher training colleges in 1987 (Phiri, 1988) and in primary schools in 1991 (Ministry of Education, 1991), the Christian faith-communities contested the extension of that change to secondary school level. It was probably an attempt to defend the gains the teaching of BK had made through the mono-faith RE curriculum.

It can also be argued that the contestation of the multi-faith RE curriculum also reflected some failure to reconcile rival values and beliefs. It was some failure to accommodate competing ways of life within a single society, without imposing a single way of life on everyone (Scorza, 2006).

The substantive claim of the study is that the contestation was a reflection of politics of the school curriculum with regard to the teaching of RE in schools. As Lawton (1980) observes, when a curriculum becomes controversial, it is essentially a political controversy reflecting two interrelated issues: the distribution of knowledge in society and the decision-making involved. Thus, in a sense, the contestation was about which knowledge about religion was to be distributed in schools and how was such a decision made.

Furthermore, politics of the school curriculum reflects competing ideologies (Kelly, 1999) and demands by diverse social actors to meet their perceived needs (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Although the policy change was meant to accommodate the different demands and interests of the Christian and Muslim faith-communities, its value was differently perceived. More specifically, the various contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change reflected various ideologies about RE.

Commenting on the political nature of education as a whole, Apple (2008, p. 241) observes that:

> Education must be seen as a political act. To do this, we need to think relationally. That is, understanding education requires that we situate it back into the unequal relations of power in the large society and into the relations of dominance and subordination – and the conflicts to change these things – that are generated by these relations.

This study has applied this understanding of the political nature of education to RE in Malawi.   The contention is that the contesting spaces reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change should be situated in the unequal relations of power as well as relations of dominance and subordination. Thus, a genealogy of RE in Malawi reflects that such relations have characterised the history of education in Malawi from the time the missionaries introduced formal western education in the 1870s to the present. The dual-mode RE curriculum also reflects such unequal relations of power and their resultant relations of dominance and subordination with respect to the faith-traditions in Malawi.

The next section discusses the dual-mode RE curriculum and illuminates it as a contested terrain, reflecting competing ideologies and influences from diverse social actors in Malawi. It is an inference based on the preceding sections, discussing the genealogy of RE in Malawi. Such a discussion is at the core of the theory of politics of the school curriculum as the overarching theoretical framework of this study

2.4.2 The Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum as a Battleground for
Competing Influences and Ideologies

In this section, I argue that the dual-mode RE curriculum is a battleground of competing ideologies and influences (Kelly, 1999) in Malawi. Since this curriculum policy was introduced as a compromise between the competing Christian and Muslim demands for RE, it can be argued that, it was introduced, among other imperatives, as a response to the competing influences and ideologies of these faith-communities (see Section 2.4.1.1 for evidence of the contestation). It can also be seen as a reflection of the tension between the liberal or non-confessional and confessional approach to RE (Carr, 2007). However, its dual-nature is, in itself, problematic in that it represents an attempt to accommodate two different spaces of RE: the mono-faith space for BK and the multi-faith space for RME. These two spaces are oppositional in terms of the theory and practice of RE. Consequently educational contradictions are created with regard to the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of RE.

Theoretically, it can be argued that since the dual-mode RE curriculum embraces two contradictory theories of teaching religion in schools, it is not clear about what it seeks to achieve at the level of education. As Fullan (1993) states, any curriculum reform initiative must have a theory of what it seeks to do at an educational level. By embracing the mono-faith and multi-faith space of RE at the same time within the same education system, the curriculum is stating two different theories of education with regard to the teaching of religion. Such contradictory theories reflect a case of competing ontologies of RE. In the mono-faith space, the ontological assumption is that there is one accepted religion which should be taught as RE. On the contrary, the ontological assumption, in the multi-faith RE space, is that there are many religions and, as such, RE should help learners to understand religion in its diversity.

Epistemologically, the dual-mode RE curriculum has two different ways by which learners can acquire knowledge. In the mono-faith space, learners can acquire knowledge based on one religion at the exclusion of other religions, as is the case with BK. On the

hand, in the multi-faith space, learners can acquire knowledge based on many religions, as is the case with RME.

Methodologically, the curriculum has some pedagogical implications as well. The mono-faith space does not promote comparative studies of religions, since it is based on one religion. As such, a mono-faith approach is very limited in the contribution it can make to the development of critical knowledge and understanding of religion as an important social phenomenon. On the other hand, the multi-faith space is open for methods that promote comparison of religions and dialogue across difference. It can, therefore, adopt methods that promote unity in diversity.

However, in some sense, the dual-mode RE curriculum can be seen as act of facing up to civic pluralism in Malawi. By creating two contradictory spaces for RE, the Ministry of Education attempted to promote a level of religious toleration essential for maintaining peace among those in support of mono-faith and multi-faith RE respectively. In his theory of *liberalism*, Scorza (2006, p. 291) calls for a "recognition and toleration of multiple reasonable conceptions of good citizenship rather that advancing…a robust but unitary view of citizenship and civic education". The dual-mode RE curriculum could be seen as such an attempt in view of Malawi's religious diversity.

A comparison of the aims of the BK and RME syllabuses can throw some light on the rationale of the dual-mode RE curriculum. The argument here is that since the curriculum contains two contesting spaces of RE, its rationale reflects politics of the school curriculum.

The next sub-section examines the BK syllabus for junior secondary school in Malawi (Forms One and Two) as a space for mono-faith RE.

2.4.2.1 Junior Certificate Examination Bible Knowledge Syllabus

The Junior Certificate Examination BK syllabus[24] (Ministry of Education, 1982a, p. 22) currently in use in Malawi secondary schools has three aims. The first aim is to provide a

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[24] The BK syllabus has not been revised since 1982. However, a revision is underway in Malawi at the time of writing this thesis.

basis for non-denominational teaching of Bible Knowledge. The second is to present the essence of the Christian faith through familiarity with the Old and New Testament. The third aim is to develop in pupils an appreciation of Bible's relevance to life and thought today.

One observation here is that the above aims focus on teaching the Bible as the scripture for Christianity but from a general Christian perspective, avoiding any denominational teachings. The ontology, epistemology and methodology of such teaching promote exclusion of other religions. Although there is no avowed aim of converting the learners, its educational contribution is limited and narrow. Whilst it is possible to develop critical knowledge of religion by studying only one religion, as is the case with BK, the narrow scope of such a study minimises its potential to widen the learners' cognitive horizon critical for understanding religion as a dimension of human and social life in a religiously diverse society. It is argued in this study that such a narrow scope lacks the potential to promote dialogue across difference in a multi-faith society.

Like the preceding sub-section, the next sub-section examines the BK syllabus for senior secondary school in Malawi (Forms Three and Four) as another mono-faith space for RE.

2.4.2.2 Malawi School Certificate Examination Bible Knowledge Syllabus

The narrow approach to the teaching of religion is also adopted in the Malawi School Certificate BK syllabus (Ministry of Education, 1982b), which has four aims, with a scope of some selected texts from the Old and New Testament. The first aim is to give learners an understanding of the scriptural basis of the Christian faith. The second is to help learners develop skills in studying, interpreting, and understanding scriptural passages. The third aim is to help learners to develop skills in understanding religious ideas and concepts, while the fourth aim is to encourage an appreciation of the Bible's relevance to life and thought today.

An examination of the above stated aims shows that they are all based on the teaching of

the scripture of one religion, Christianity. Both syllabuses are mono-faith in nature. Although there is no aim of converting the pupils, it can be argued that the underlying motivation is promotion of knowledge and understanding of Christianity only. There is no room for the teaching of other religions. It is argued in this study that such exclusion of other religions is suspect in a democratic and religiously diverse society. This would beg the question: why is one religion privileged over and against other religions? One possible answer could be hegemony of one faith over other faiths[25].

Except in a very limited sense, it would be difficult to show how such teaching would help learners to develop critical knowledge and understanding of what religion is, let alone skills needed to dialogue across difference. Because of its narrow scope, learners can only have limited knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a member of religion and how religion affects the world and society in which we live (Read et al., 1992). Such type of teaching is difficult to justify on educational grounds. In this regard, some educationists and philosophers of education (Barrow, 2006; Hirst & Peters, 1970; Hirst, 1974, 1984) argue that, for any subject to be included in the school curriculum, it has to contribute towards the school curriculum aims in a unique way. Such a contribution is referred to as 'justification on educational grounds'. This requirement also applies to the inclusion of RE in the school curriculum.

Furthermore, the above aims reflect an assumption that RE should be Christian in nature and based on the Bible as the scripture of Christianity. It is argued in this study that such an assumption promotes a pedagogy of RE which is in line with the evangelistic aims of the missionaries who started western formal education in Malawi. However, the trend worldwide has been to move from confessional and mono-faith to non-confessional and multi-faith RE in public schools. Therefore, the exclusion of other religions in a democratic and religiously diverse society is, in itself, problematic, given the increasingly pluralistic nature of our contemporary society (Slattery, 2006).

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[25] This is theorised in Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.

It was the desire to address this problem that led The Ministry of Education to introduce a multi-faith curriculum in its national education system. Justifying the introduction of the multi-faith syllabus (RME) in 2000, the then director of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education was quoted by the *Nation* newspaper (Semu, 2000, p. 3) as saying:

> Religious and Moral Studies is more wider [sic] than Bible Knowledge since the old subject only covered the Bible, but the thinking is that society is entitled to learn and know all the religions that are in the country and not Christianity only. ...All we are trying to teach the pupils is that there is a supreme being and not to put dividing lines.

Thus, for the government of Malawi, the general rationale for RE was presented in terms of the need for a democratic and united citizenry.

In the next sub-section, I discuss the syllabus RME as a multi-faith space.

2.4.2.3   Religious and Moral Education Syllabus

This sub-section argues that the RME syllabus, as a multi-faith space, seeks to help learners develop social and life skills such as cultural literacy and civic tolerance. These are skills essential for citizenship in democratic and pluralistic societies. The rationale for RME is framed within Malawi's socio-political context. It takes into account the social and political changes besetting Malawi. For instance, part of its rationale (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. iv) reads as follows:

> The advent of political pluralism in Malawi along with environmental degradation, technological challenges, moral decay, violence and juvenile delinquency, STDs, HIV/AIDS, drug and substance abuse has created a lot of challenges to the nation in general, and to the youth in particular. To successfully address these challenges the religious and moral education syllabus covers multi-faith instructions across the three major religions of Malawi, namely, Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions.
>
> The syllabus will enable students to appreciate moral, social, spiritual and cultural values from more than one religion. They should also understand

> concepts, skills, values and attitudes involved in understanding different religions and how these affect the lives of people.
>
> … Thus the syllabus includes knowledge of relevant aspects of human development, law, religious and secular traditions. Certain values and attitudes are also addressed. These include self-esteem, responsibility, assertiveness, respect for others and their views, respect for life and human dignity, open mindedness, unity in religious diversity, conflict resolution, tolerance and sense of fairness. Environmental and gender issues are also addressed from both moral and religious perspectives.

The above rationale reflects an educational response to Malawi's context-specific and global realities. Thus, while developing critical knowledge and understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life, the multi-faith curriculum also seeks to pay attention to knowledge and understanding about vital and emerging global issues. In essence, the curriculum seeks to help learners develop social and life skills such as "greater understanding of self and others, the clarification of values, cultural literacy, and civil toleration of differences (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 45). These skills are crucial for citizenship in a democratic and pluralistic society (as discussed in Section 2.5 below).

In the next sub-section, I examine the objectives of RME and their relevance for Malawi as a democratic and pluralistic society. I also argue that the objectives of the RME syllabus simultaneously provide a justification for multi-faith RE in Malawi. They also seek to enhance the teaching of RE with the intention of understanding the rich diversity of our pluralist society.

2.4.2.4 Objectives of Religious and Moral Education Syllabus

In this section I argue that while the objectives of the RME syllabus provide a justification for multi-faith RE in Malawi, these also seek to promote the teaching of RE with the goal of understanding – not converting or condemning – the rich diversity of our pluralist society (Slattery, 2006). Basically, the thinking is that Malawi is a pluralistic society that includes a variety of religions. In that context, a relevant RE curriculum should help learners to develop knowledge and understanding of such a society. There are

nineteen objectives of the RME syllabus (Ministry of Education, 1998), which Mphande and Byers summarise into seven (2001, p. 4) as follows:

- to develop students' knowledge, skills, values and attitudes involved in understanding religion.
- to develop students' knowledge and understanding of their own religious traditions.
- to help students acquire religious and moral knowledge and skills necessary to lead a healthy life in harmony with nature.
- to help students explore different religious beliefs, practices and related human experiences
- to develop students' personal and social responsibility.
- to foster tolerance of different religious traditions and practices in Malawi
- to answer important questions about the meaning and purpose of life.

An observation here is that these objectives reflect a change in the conceptualisation of RE for public schools. While the BK syllabus is mono-faith, the RME syllabus is multi-faith and non-confessional in approach. The RME aims at helping learners to develop religious and moral knowledge and understanding of the Malawian society, in particular, and the world, in general.

Another insight is that the dual-mode RE curriculum has the potential to help learners develop religious literacy (Slattery, 2006). Religious literacy here is used to denote critical knowledge and understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life in the world and society in which we live. By exploring the dual-mode RE curriculum the study has illuminated the debate in RE curriculum theory and practice represented by the BK and RME syllabuses. As observed by Carr (2005, p. 35):

> The discourse of educational debate is never neutral. However covertly and however implicitly, it always promotes some educational values and marginalises others.

Thus, within the framework of politics of the school curriculum, the study illuminates educational values that are promoted or marginalised through the dual-mode RE curriculum. Cary (2006, p. xi) observes that, "historically, moves and counter-moves to define curriculum have occurred within highly contested terrain". The dual-mode RE curriculum reflects such a contested terrain.

In the next sub-section the complex process that led to the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001, as an attempt to accommodate the contesting views about RE in Malawi, is discussed.

2.4.2.5 Complexity in the Adoption of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum[26]

This sub-section highlights that the dual-mode RE curriculum option adopted in Malawi in 2001, based on BK and RME, was a product of a complex process of curriculum negotiation by stakeholders. It is interesting to note that during the negotiation process between The Ministry of Education and the faith-communities in 2000, various curricular options were proposed. Documentary evidence[27] shows that a number of options were recommended before the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum. One of the recommendations was that RME had to be removed from schools. This was against multi-faith RE in schools. Another recommendation was that both BK and RME had to be removed from all public schools. This was against both mono-faith and multi-faith RE in schools and anti-RE in general. A third recommendation was that RME and BK had to be taught in private schools only. This was anti-RE in public schools but giving room for private schools to teach RE depending on their choice. Lastly, it was also recommended that BK and RME had to be dropped completely from both public and private schools. In other words, there should be no teaching of religion in schools. This was against RE in both public and private schools and was also anti-RE.

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[26] The sources for this section were minutes of curriculum consultative meetings held by The Ministry of Education with the nationally organised faith-communities in Malawi in 2000.
[27] Minutes of the first consultation on the junior secondary school Religious and moral Education held on 20th March 2000 in The Ministry of Education Conference Room in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Complexity of curriculum negotiation was also manifested in the reasons advanced in support of the contesting curriculum options. One of the reasons for the contestation was that multi-faith RE was perceived as giving advantage to one religion or faith. This can be seen as a reaction against privileging one faith over other faiths. However, the advantaged religion was not named. Another reason was that RME was perceived as failing to promote in learners an appreciation of particular chosen faiths, but there was no elaboration as to why and how RME failed to do that. A speculation here could be that since RME was multi-faith, it was perceived as forcing learners to study religions other than their own.

Furthermore, RME was perceived to have created so much tension between the faith-communities that mutual tolerance advocated by the syllabus was greatly tested. This was in reference to the threats made by both the Christian and Muslim faith-community leaders as covered in some of the newspapers articles (Chitosi, 2000a; Paliani, 2000).

Another complex aspect was that while the Christian faith-community leaders opposed the multi-faith approach, the Muslim faith-communities supported it. One reason advanced for the opposition was that there were no trained teachers for RME because all RE teachers had been trained to teach the mono-faith syllabus of BK. It can be observed here that whilst it is the duty of government to provide such teachers, the problem of shortage of teachers did not only affect RE but all subjects in the school curriculum. Moreover, anecdotal evidence indicates that the qualified specialist teachers of RE graduating from the University of Malawi and Domasi College of Education undergo training to teach multi-faith RE. Lack of trained RE teachers was, therefore, not a sufficient reason to stop the implementation of a multi-faith RE curriculum.

Another reason was that RME would interfere with the teaching of other religions. Probably this was in reference to the confessional and dogmatic approach of the respective religions in their quest to promote faith among learners. Another possibility could be because RME was based on three religions only: Christianity, Islam, and

African Traditional Religions (Minutes of the first consultative meeting on junior secondary school religious and moral education, 20th March, 2000).

In addition, a more political reason was given with specific reference to the inclusion of some content on African Traditional Religions in the RME syllabus. The Nyau practice (masked-dance ritual practice) was just one of the tribal practices in Malawi. It was, therefore, argued, that the inclusion of this practice, at the exclusion of other tribal practices, might presuppose the supremacy of the tribe from which the practice was drawn. It can be observed that this reason illuminates the complexity faced in deciding which knowledge should be included in the school curriculum and is a reflection of politics of the school curriculum (Garfinkel, 2003; Gergen, 2003; Hirst, 1974; Lawton, 1980, 1983).

The next section juxtaposes the dual-mode RE curriculum and some of Malawi's national goals of education to illuminate several contradictions between the two.

2.5 Contradictions between the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum and Some of Malawi's National Goals of Education

This section unmasks the contradictions between the dual-mode RE curriculum and the national goals of education in Malawi. This is done by comparing the objectives of BK and RME syllabuses with some of the national goals of education in Malawi. The aim is to theorise the justification of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The overarching argument is that the two syllabuses represent two oppositional RE spaces. Such oppositional spaces create educational ambiguities about the role of RE in public schools, negating or minimising the educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum. Apparently, the curriculum's supposedly 'real' value is political: creating a win-win situation between the Christian and Muslim faith-communities in their demands for RE curriculum space for their respective religions.

A case can be made here by comparing the objectives of BK and RME syllabi with some of Malawi's secondary education objectives. These objectives relate to citizenship, ethical and socio-cultural skills (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. vi). For instance, under citizenship skills, some of the objectives stipulate that learners should tolerate other people's views and beliefs, develop a sense of good neighbourliness, an awareness of one's rights, respect for other people's rights as well as a sense of national, regional and international understanding.

On the other hand, under ethical and socio-cultural skills, some of the objectives state that learners should develop awareness, understanding and appreciation of the value of the individual in society, and develop moral, spiritual and ethical values. In addition other objectives stipulate that learners should know the various cultural practices of Malawi, appreciate Malawi's diverse cultural practices, acquire appropriate socio-cultural skills, and develop an appreciation and respect for one's culture and other people' cultures (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Comparing the above objectives with the aims of BK syllabus shows a big mismatch. The BK objectives fall short of promoting the values and ethos of democracy, mutual tolerance, understanding and appreciation between people of different religious or cultural backgrounds. As such, any claims about the contribution of BK to Malawi's national goals of education could be interpreted as out of touch with Malawi's educational aspirations. It is argued in this study that such claims could be perceived as a mere attempt to justify the syllabus on the premise of Malawi' national goals of education, yet its conceptual underpinnings do not reflect that educational reality.

The educational reality is that the above-mentioned secondary education objectives for Malawi cannot be achieved in the mono-faith space of the dual-mode RE curriculum, where BK is taught. This is because other religions are excluded. To that extent, it fails to provide a discursive space for cultivating dialogue across religious difference. On the other hand, the objectives of RME syllabus have the potential to contribute to the above secondary education objectives. The multi-faith space allows for the teaching and learning of other religions. For instance, the rationale for the RME syllabus

acknowledges that Malawi is a pluralistic society that includes a variety of religions. As such, a relevant syllabus should help learners develop knowledge and understanding of such a society (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Thus, the RME objectives show a strong alignment with Malawi's secondary education objectives stated above. To that extent, the syllabus has the potential to contribute to the realisation of some of Malawi's national goals of education. It can provide a discursive space for learners to dialogue across their religious differences. Lealman (1984, p. 10) observes that:

> an important part of RE is the development of attitudes such as tolerance and appreciation of religions and cultures different from one's own; sensitivity to social problems and human needs; awareness of human values.

The claim is that this contribution of RE is more likely to be made by RME, not BK, because of the difference between mono-faith and multi-faith RE. This difference brings into question the educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The mono-faith RE space contradicts some of the national goals of education in Malawi, especially those seeking to help learners develop respect for people whose beliefs and values differ from their own. As Ball (1994, 2006) and (Odden, 1991) observe, policy may have the desired impact if there is a higher degree of coherence among the prevailing policies in society. Thus, it can be argued that by embracing two contradictory spaces, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy fails to connect well with the national goals of education in Malawi. More specifically, there is lack of coherence between the national goals of education and the objectives of the BK syllabus.

On the contrary, the citizenship, ethical and socio-cultural skills stipulated in the national goals of education in Malawi can be achieved through the RME syllabus. For instance, the rationale of the RME syllabus is in keeping with Malawi's secondary education objectives. By teaching more religions on an equal basis, learners can develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion. Commenting on the potential of multi-faith RE for the cultivation of positive life skills, Chidester et al (1996, p. 45) observe that:

> If based on clear educational aims, rather than a religious agenda, multi-tradition programmes can promote a range of secondary benefits, such as a greater understanding of self and others, the clarification of values, cultural literacy, and civil toleration of differences. The primary aim of a multi-tradition approach, however, is to provide students with an opportunity to learn about religion by studying actual religions.

However, the problem with the dual-mode RE curriculum is with its contradictory educational implications. In essence, the curriculum is a call upon public schools to create two different teaching and learning spaces for RE: the mono-faith and multi-faith space. The two spaces create educational ambiguities. As such, the curriculum's educational value is negated or minimised.

As the findings of this research show (see Chapters Six and Seven), the understandings by research participants did not challenge and interrogate these two contradictory spaces. That silence has the effect of rendering the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change less valuable on educational grounds. Consequently, the curriculum's value appears to be more political than educational, maintaining peace and unity among people espousing two different conceptions of RE. The contradictory spaces are not conducive for life skills such as civil toleration of differences, cultural literacy, as well as values of democracy and unity in religious diversity.

The last section presents a summary of Chapter Two.

2.6   Chapter Summary

This chapter has framed the historical and socio-political context of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. Using genealogical analysis, a trajectory of hegemony has been discussed from the time the Christian missionaries started establishing western formal education in the 1870s to the present when secondary schools have a dual-mode RE curriculum. It has been argued that the Christian missionary conception of RE was confessional because schools were viewed as agents of evangelisation and conversion. With that understanding, Christianity monopolised the curriculum space in schools, translating into hegemony of the Christian faith in education. That hegemony started as classic exclusivism when education was under the

control of the Christian missionaries and became progressive exclusivism when education was under the control of the government. It has also been argued that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is problematic since it espouses two different spaces of RE: the mono-faith and the multi-faith. As such, the curriculum continues to accommodate a privileged space enjoyed by Christianity, much to the continuity of hegemony in RE.

Thus, Part One framed the study within Malawi's historical and socio-political context. Chapter One introduced the study with respect to its orientation and background in the context of Malawi, and Chapter Two employed a Foucauldian notion of genealogy to describe and discuss the historical development of RE Curriculum theory and practice in Malawi, as summarized in the paragraph above. In Part Two the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological landscape of the study will be presented. Part two is comprised of Chapters Three, Four and Five. In Chapter Three, selected literature is reviewed; the analytical route of the study is discussed in Chapter Four; and the design and methodology is described in Chapter Five.

Part Two: Mapping a Theoretical, Conceptual and Methodological Landscape of the Study

In Part Two, a discussion of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological landscape of the study is presented. Although, the theoretical and conceptual framework is discussed here, theorising within the framework of politics of the school curriculum is pervasive across the entire study. This theoretical and conceptual landscape serves to bring together the specific theoretical and conceptual aspects used to analyse and interpret the research findings of the study.

In general, the study is framed within a broader theoretical and conceptual landscape in Chapters Three and Four. In particular, Chapter Three provides a review of selected literature, and contextualises the study within a body of several local and international scholarly opinions on RE curriculum theory and practice. Chapter Four maps the analytical route of the study by discussing its theoretical and conceptual framework.

The methodological landscape of the study, presented in Chapter Five, describes and justifies the study design with respect to the methodology and methods employed in generating and analysing data to answer the critical question of the study.

Chapter Three

Archaeology of Religious Education Curriculum Theory and Practice

…religion is a significant factor and often the hidden script behind many curriculum controversies…We ignore religion and theology in our curriculum conversations at our peril[28].

3.1   Introduction

The fundamental concern that informs this chapter is the contextualization of the study within the existing relevant corpus of knowledge in RE curriculum theory and practice. Borrowing from Foucault's concept of archaeology (Foucault, 1972), a sample of both local and international literature is reviewed to analyse the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice. The review highlights that generally religion is a critical curriculum imperative for many national educational systems (Slattery, 2006). As the opening quotation of this chapter cautions, both curriculum theorists and practioners should be mindful of the role religion can play in influencing and shaping curriculum controversies (Slattery, 2006), and the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice, as a discursive formation (Foucault, 1972, 1980).

Firstly, the chapter analyses some of the cutting-edge debates in RE curriculum theory and practice. Secondly, the silences in literature about studies on a dual-mode RE curriculum are identified. It is argued that this study addresses that gap as its contribution to knowledge. Thirdly, the chapter appraises some concepts within a discourse of RE to theorise the findings of the study. Thus, in view of the above, this chapter is important for an understanding of the topic of study in terms "of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are" (Hart, 1998, p. 1). It provides a map or framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of some scholarly opinions on RE curriculum theory and practice and how they have been employed to make meaning of the findings of the study.

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[28] Slattery, 2006, p. 75.

Furthermore, drawing on the view that "a necessary and vital part of understanding anything is to have clear concepts" (Barrow & Woods, 2006, p. 19), this chapter discusses some concepts central to the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice as used in this study. It serves to establish a common understanding of the theoretical and conceptual stance of the study. The discussion is organised under four main headings. The first deals with archaeological analysis of RE curriculum theory and practice. This is followed by a discussion of some debates on RE and their bearing on this study. Thirdly, a phenomenological perspective of RE curriculum options for public schools is presented, locating the place of the dual-mode RE curriculum in such a theoretical and conceptual landscape. Lastly, the chapter discusses some influences on RE curriculum theory and practices and illuminates how an understanding of such influences can help to theorise the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi.

3.2 Archaeological Analysis

In this section, I borrow from and discuss Foucault's (1972) notion of archaeology to analyse the issues, debates and trends in the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice in general. A discourse is defined in terms of statements of things said about social phenomena or historical events (Olssen et al., 2004). The concern of archaeology is "to describe the historical presuppositions of a given system of thought" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 45) or discourse. Its attention is "on the link between perception and action and why at different periods specialists in knowledge perceive knowledge differently" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 46). To that extent, "the core of archaeology is ...to establish the discursive practices and rules of formation of discourses" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 47). This is done through asking "how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another" (Foucault, 1972, p. 27). Thus, archaeology, as a Foucauldian concept, is employed to describe the historical presuppositions underlying the issues, debates and trends in RE curriculum theory and practice globally and in the context of Malawi. In the history of education in Malawi, it may help to illuminate the presuppositions informing RE curriculum theory and practice, as discussed in Chapter Two.

One observation here is that archaeological analysis reveals that the inclusion of RE in the school curriculum is not universally and uncritically accepted or supported. This is evidenced by the many controversies and protracted debates associated with RE in public education. The various RE curriculum options that different national education systems adopt also reflect how controversial the teaching of religion in schools is. The dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi is an example of such a controversial terrain. It is argued in this chapter that the debates and controversies, in themselves, can be described and theorised as a manifestation of politics of the school curriculum. They reflect contestation of the conduct of RE in public education.

The next subsection highlights some debates in RE curriculum theory and practice as part of archaeological analysis.

3.2.1   Debates in Religious Education Curriculum Theory and Practice

In this section, I review some scholarly opinions of RE to illuminate a variety of conceptions regarding the theory and practice of RE (Hull, 1984, 2007). These conceptions differ according to historical and socio-political contexts. What is clear, is that there is no universally accepted way of conceptualising RE in public schools. As such, RE is one of those school subjects characterised by contestation by various social groups with different ideologies. However, a global picture of RE curriculum theory and practice is important for a deeper understanding of any RE curriculum (Waddington, 1996).

Commenting on RE as a contemporary problem, Wardekker and Miedema (2007, p. 76) observe that:

> In the present time, the goals, contents, and position of religious education in schools are by no means self-evident. Instead, religious education has become a prime example of an area of which even its right to exist is contested between various groups with an interest in education.

The above observation aptly describes the situation in which Malawi's RE curriculum finds itself now. By providing two different RE spaces, the dual-mode curriculum is problematic. The two spaces imply different RE discourses and differently determine the pedagogy of RE.

The term pedagogy is used here to denote the theory of teaching and learning religion, encompassing aims, curriculum content and methodology. Grimmitt (2007, p. 1) defines pedagogy as "a science of teaching and learning embodying both curriculum and methodology." The fundamental concern of pedagogy is to relate the process of teaching to that of learning on the part of the learner (Simon, 1981). Thus, in pedagogic terms, the mono-faith approach involves teaching and learning that helps a learner to have knowledge and understanding of one religion or faith. This is what is described as a single-tradition approach (Chidester et al., 1994). For the multi-faith approach, the pedagogy is based on many religions, helping learners to develop wider knowledge and understanding of religion. Chidester et al (1994) describe this pedagogy as multiple-tradition approach.

One insight is that any RE curriculum reflects a pedagogical option about the teaching and learning of religion. Basically, the processes of teaching and learning are predicated on religious content since religion is the source of the content in RE. The term religion here is used in its generic sense to encompass all various forms, expressions, manifestations, or traditions of religion. RE can be based on one or several religions. For example, it can be based on content drawn from one of these faith-traditions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and African Traditional Religions, respectively, or it can be based on various combinations of these religions.

It is argued in this chapter that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change reflects one possible combination where two spaces are created for RE. RME provides the multi-faith space where Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions are taught. On the other hand, BK provides the mono-faith space where knowledge about the Bible as scripture for the Christian faith is exclusively promoted. These two oppositional spaces

reflect competing ideologies and demands about what should be taught as RE in the school curriculum. To that extent, they represent a form of politics the school curriculum (Kelly, 1999; Lawton, 1980).

Another insight is that a conceptual definition of RE varies according to what a society conceives to be the nature and purpose of teaching religion in schools. Literature reflects a complex variety of factors that influences the conceptualisation of RE from country to country. However, there is silence on RE based on two oppositional syllabuses: one mono-faith and the other multi-faith, as is the case with the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi. Thus, the study represents another perspective in the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice, pushing the boundaries of knowledge with a dual-mode RE curriculum perspective.

The next sub-section discusses contesting spaces in RE reflected in literature reviewed and as informed by the religious and educational conceptions of the teaching of religion in schools.

3.2.2   Religious versus Educational Conception of Religious Education

Under this sub-section, I review some scholarly opinions characterising debates in RE curriculum theory and practice. These opinions may be divided into two broad categories (Carr, 2007; Chidester et al., 1994; Grimmitt, 1978, 2000; Holm, 1975; Hull, 1984, 2007; King, 1984; Slattery, 2006; Smart 1998; Summers, 1996; Waddington, 1996; Wood, 1984). The first category relates to the conception of RE as a "religious activity" while the second relates to the conception of RE as an "educational activity" (Hull, 1984, p. 284). These two categories have underpinned debates over the role of RE in public education. It is the contention of this study that the contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change are a manifestation of the tension between these two conceptions of RE.

The conception of RE as a religious activity leads to a mono-faith and confessional approach to the teaching and learning of religion in schools (Carr, 2007; Hull, 2007). The aim is to promote confession of, and commitment to, a particular faith or religion. Its focus is on initiating the learners into a faith and/or helping them to grow in it (Grimmitt, 1978; Holm, 1975; Hull, 1984; Shepherd, 1984; Summers, 1996; Wood, 1984).

Hull (1984, p. 284) observes that conceptualising RE as a religious activity is:

> the traditional view, and it is probably safe to say that in all past societies and in most present day societies religious education has been understood as that process of teaching and learning by means of which religions have sought for their transmission and self-perpetuation.

This approach is described as dogmatic, indoctrination, or religious instruction (Grimmitt, 2000a). The overriding concern is "to broaden, deepen, or enhance a student's personal commitment to the beliefs, practices, and experiences of a particular religious tradition" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 43).

On the other hand, the conception of RE as an educational activity leads to non-confessional approach (Carr, 2007). It can easily lead to multi-faith RE by drawing its content from many faiths. I describe this conception as liberal RE since its intention is to help learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion, what it means to be a member of a religion, and how religion affects the world and the society in which we live, with emphasis on religion as a social phenomenon (Holm, 1975; Smart, 1984, 1998). In Religious Studies, it is also known as a phenomenological approach (Smart, 1973, 1984; Steyn, 2004).

It is argued in this study that the educational conception of RE has the potential of helping learners to develop social and life skills such as the clarification of values, civil toleration of differences, and cultural literacy (Chidester et al., 1994). It asserts that the point of teaching religion is education, not faith. Furthermore, this conception can be based on one faith as is the case with BK in Malawi. However, it can be criticised as

giving learners a narrow perspective of religion in the midst of many faiths. Thus, although mono-faith RE can be non-confessional, a multi-faith RE has a greater potential to be non-confessional because it promotes knowledge of religion as a dimension of personal and social life of many, if not most, people in society. Such knowledge is promoted by studying many religions. As Steyn (2004. p. x) observes:

> The aim of multi-religion content in the classroom is to promote knowledge and understanding of religions and other worldviews in order to help children to live in harmony with others. It is not to convert children to a specific religion that we regard as the 'right' one, or to nurture them in their own religion.

More recently, in the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice, there has been an emerging debate over the use of the terms 'Religion Education' and 'Religious Education'. Some scholars (Chidester et al., 1994; Steyn 2004) favour the use of the term 'Religion Education' to denote the teaching and learning of religion as an educational activity, which is described as non-confessional or liberal RE. On the other hand, the term 'Religious Education' is used to refer to the teaching of religion as a religious activity, which is described as confessional RE (Carr, 2007).

However, for other scholars (Grimmitt, 1978; Holm, 1975; Hull, 1984; Slattery, 2006; Smart, 1998; Summers, 1996; Wood, 1984) it is the intention and not the name that matters most in conceptualising RE. Thus, it is possible to use the name 'Religious Education' with an educational or religious intention. The same would apply to 'Religion Education'. This study uses the term RE in its generic sense, denoting the teaching and learning of religion in schools. It is the aim that determines whether RE is conceptualised as a religious or an educational activity.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that if applied consistently, the terms 'religion education' and 'religious education' can be useful terms of differentiating RE as an educational activity from RE as a religious activity. What is clear from both local and international literature is that the term 'Religious Education' is widely used. This study has employed

the term Religious Education in this sense; using the religious-educational divide to distinguish confessional from non-confessional RE.

Furthermore, some descriptive and historical studies have foregrounded RE curriculum theory and practice in Africa in the context of types of education in Africa (Banda, 1982; Nankwenya, 1977; ter Haar, 1990). For instance, ter Haar (1990) discusses RE in sub-Saharan Africa with reference to African indigenous education, western education and Islamic education. With reference to RE in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, ter Haar (1990) observes that there is a growing realisation among educators in Africa that RE should also incorporate aspects of African Religion. More specifically, Banda (1982) discusses a brief history of education in Malawi, foregrounding pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial education in Malawi. On the other hand, some scholars such as Nankwenya (1977) and McCracken (2000) examine the contribution of the Christian missionaries to education in Malawi. This study argues that the current inclusion of African Traditional Religions in Malawi's RE curriculum is a reflection of the need to recognise religious diversity in curriculum theory and practice.

The next subsection discusses a variety of approaches of learning RE as gleaned from literature. They are presented as RE epistemologies and part of archaeological analysis of the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice.

3.2.3   Religious Education Epistemologies

In this section, I discuss some RE epistemologies. My central argument is that within the overarching framework of politics of the school curriculum, these epistemologies can reflect contesting spaces in curriculum policy change. From the point of view of archaeology (Foucault, 1972) of RE, they reflect the historical presuppositions of each epistemology as a given system of thought (Olssen et al., 2004).

The expression "religious education epistemology" is used here to denote the acquisition of knowledge about religion in schools. The religious-educational binary of

conceptualising RE described above has a direct bearing on the epistemology in RE. Central to each of these conceptions is an intention to promote a particular kind or several kinds of interaction between learners and the RE content. Each interaction is considered appropriate and desirable, reflecting epistemological assumptions underpinning each RE curriculum. There is a variety of scholarly opinion on RE epistemologies.

Grimmitt (2000b) divides these epistemologies into two broad categories. First, those that contribute to the learning about religion; and second, those that contribute to the learning from religion. Whilst in the former category the learners are expected to interact with the RE content in a way that enables them to learn something about religion, in the latter, learners are expected to interact with the RE content in a manner that enables them to learn from religion aspects that shape, in one way or another, their personal development. On learning from religion, Summers (1996, p. 57) observes that, learners, "in studying a particular religion, must attempt to penetrate to the "essence" of that religion and extract from that experience lessons for their own lives". Elaborating these two categories, Grimmitt (2000b, p. 2) says that:

> In the former category are included instructional, conceptual, empathetic interactions (i.e. where pupils assimilate and accommodate the content as understood within its faith context), and in the latter category, reflective, interpretive, critical, and evaluative interactions (i.e. where pupils assimilate and accommodate the content as understood within its faith context but then re-contextualise and reconstruct it within their own self-understanding for the purposes of values clarification, existential analysis, illumination of personal constructs, etc., or subject its truth claims to critical evaluation using criteria from a variety of disciplines - philosophical, scientific, ethical, psychological, etc.). Most of the pedagogies of RE which have been developed in the last fifteen or twenty years seek to promote interactions in both categories, but not in relation to all the components of each category listed here.

Hull (2007) adds a third category of RE epistemology to Grimmitt's (2000) two categories. His typology includes learning-religion, learning-about-religion, and learning-from-religion epistemologies. Firstly, the learning-religion epistemology obtains in a situation where a single religious tradition is taught and learnt as RE. Teachers are

expected to be believers in the religion they teach and the aim is to enable the learners to believe in that religion or strengthen their commitment to it. RE based on this epistemology "may also be described as proceeding from faith to faith" (Hull, 2007, p. 2). It is another way of describing confessional RE (Carr, 2007). Central to it is the promotion of faith among learners. Faith-communities tend to favour this epistemology and any departure from it tends to be understood as secularisation of RE. Secularisation occurs when RE ceases to promote faith among the learners in favour of promoting academic, critical knowledge and understanding of religion as social phenomenon (Smart, 1984, 1998).

Adopting the learning-religion epistemology in public schools tends to be criticised for many reasons. One criticism is that it promotes indoctrination, which philosophers of education disqualify as an educational activity (Barrow & Woods, 2006; Hirst, 1974, 1984; Hirst & Peters, 1970). For instance, Hirst (1984, p. 260) observes that:

> Philosophers of education have come to see religious education as aiming at pupils' understanding of the claims and significance of one or more religions, not their acceptance and commitment to the beliefs and practices of any one faith.

Furthermore, the learning-religion epistemology can also be criticised on the grounds that it can easily lead to exclusion of other faiths in the RE curriculum. Such exclusion is against social cohesion and promotes divisiveness in a religiously diverse society, by privileging one religion (Summers, 1996). That privileging promotes hegemony of one faith over other faiths. Another criticism is that it is the business of each religion to ensure its own transmission to the next generation. The public school should not be expected to do the work of the faith-communities or families in promoting their respective religions or faiths (Chidester et al., 1994; Hull, 2007; Summers & Waddington, 1996). Religion in schools should be taught for merely academic reasons just like any other subject included in the school curriculum.

Secondly, the learning-about-religion epistemology promotes a descriptive and historical study of religion as a social phenomenon. It involves what Hull (2007) describes as teaching religion from the outside as opposed to the teaching-religion epistemology where religion is taught from the inside. It is also known by various designations such as education in comparative religion or religious studies.

The 19th century founder of modern comparative religion, Muller (1873), observes that anyone who knows only one religion knows nothing about religion. This claim is expressed through the famous aphorism: "He who knows one, knows none" (Muller's (1873, p. 16). It simply entails that sound knowledge about religion can be acquired through a study of two or more religions. For Muller (1873), a scientific study of religion should involve a comparative study of many religions. Thus, in a sense, the learning-about-religion epistemology is an attempt at a scientific study of religion. Hull (2007, p. 3) observes that the learning-about-religion approach

> is often motivated by the desire to create a purely educational form of religious education, one which will not be open to the charge of indoctrinating or giving an unfair advantage to any particular religion.

This approach has the merit of serving a pluralistic society, with learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds, without favouring any faith or religion. It can also play a significant role in preventing religious intolerance, bigotry and fanaticism since it promotes dialogue across difference. This study argues that, with this approach, a discursive space is created where learners have "an opportunity to learn about religion by studying actual religions" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 45). Furthermore, it empowers learners with critical skills for interpreting religious phenomena, thereby releasing them from unexamined beliefs and helping them "to break down the stereotypes of other religious traditions" (Hull, 2007, p. 4).

However, because of its historical and descriptive approach to religion, it often makes little or no explicit contribution to the learners' search for moral or spiritual values. Yet one of the often cited aims of education is to help learners develop intellectually,

physically, socially, morally, and spiritually. This approach tends to emphasise

intellectual development at the expense of the social, moral and spiritual dimensions of

human development (Jackson, 1997). However, in the discourse of philosophy of

education (Barrow & Woods, 2006), it is argued that knowledge and understanding are

the basis for change or transformation that education is supposed to promote.

Thus, Philosophers of education (Barrow & Woods, 1995, 2006; Carr, 2005; Hirst, 1984;

Hirst & Peters, 1970) would justify this epistemology on educational grounds. Hirst

(1984, p. 260) observes that:

> There has been developed a concept of education that no longer sees
> education as concerned with bodies of knowledge and belief which pupils
> are expected to accept. Instead beliefs in areas, including religion, are
> presented as acceptable only when they are justifiable by appropriated
> publicly agreed canons. In areas like religion where no such canons exist
> for truth claims that are made, education cannot be concerned with pupils
> coming to know or believe the claims themselves. But it can properly
> concern itself with pupils coming to know what religious people believe
> and the proper grounds for our knowing that they believe these things.
> Education is here sharply distinguished from indoctrination, evangelism,
> or catechesis.

Thus, apart from developing critical knowledge and understanding of religion, the

learning-about-religion epistemology has the potential of helping learners to develop

social and life skills such as greater understanding of self and others, the clarification of

values, cultural literacy and civil toleration of differences (Chidester et al., 1994). Such

skills are important in overcoming bigotry and prejudices while promoting mutual respect

and unity in diversity among learners. The RME syllabus for secondary schools in

Malawi would be an example here, although it only covers three major religious

traditions of Malawi, namely, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions.

Another criticism of the learning-about-religion epistemology is that emphasis is placed

on learning about religion (Hull, 2007, p. 4). It is the internal structure of religion rather

than the life-world of the learner which is emphasised. To overcome that limitation,

Grimmitt (2000a) and Hull (2007) propose the learning-from religion-approach which

seeks to help learners gain educational benefit from the study of religion.

The learning-from-religion epistemology is an attempt to address the limitations of the learning-religion and learning-about-religion approaches (Hull, 2007). It does not expect learners to participate in the beliefs and practices of the religion being taught (as in the learning-religion approach). It also goes beyond the scientific study of religion (as in the learning-about-religion approach) to relate religion to the life-world of the learners. The primary objective of this epistemology is to promote the *socialisation, individuation*, and *humanisation* of the learners. *Socialisation* here entails helping learners understand and appreciate religion as part of the world and society in which they live. *Individuation* denotes helping learners develop according to their individual potential with critical knowledge and understanding of religion in society. *Humanisation*, on the other hand, entails helping learners develop as full human beings by contributing to their moral and spiritual development. As Hull (2007, p. 4) puts it, the learning-from-religion approach promotes:

> the kind of religious education that has as its principal objective the humanisation of the pupils, that is, making a contribution to the pupils' moral and spiritual development.

In the learning-religion-approach, religion is taught as an object of faith to which the learners are led but in the learning-about-religion approach, religion is taught as an object worthy of critical study (Hull, 2007). The learning-from-religion approach shifts the focus to the learners and what they can gain from the study of religion for their individuation as well as humanisation.

Thus, conceptualising RE as a religious activity would belong to the learning-religion epistemology while RE as an educational activity would belong to either the learning-about-religion or learning-from-religion epistemology. Contesting spaces in RE curriculum policy change may reflect different conceptions as well as different epistemologies in RE. People support RE that accommodates their favoured epistemology. In a sense, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is a reflection of demands for different epistemologies of RE.

The change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE can reflect a shift from the learning-religion to either the learning-about-religion or learning-from-religion epistemology. Each epistemology has an impact on RE curriculum theory and practice. As discussed in Chapter Two, the dual-mode RE curriculum accommodates the BK syllabus as a mono-faith space and the RME syllabus as a multi-faith space, implying different epistemologies of RE.

The next section discusses the various RE curriculum options as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum with regard to the teaching of religion in school. This is part of archaeological analysis of the discourse in RE curriculum theory and practice.

3.3   A Phenomenological Perspective: Religious Education Curriculum Options in Public Education

In this section, I explore some RE curriculum options within the overarching framework of politics of the school curriculum. Like for the RE epistemologies discussed above, the argument here is that the various curriculum options can also be seen as contesting spaces with regard to RE for public schools. This exploration is based on seven curriculum options namely: exclusion of RE from public schools; confessional RE; non-confessional RE; RE based on the religious composition of learners; multi-faith RE as a religious activity; integrating RE with other school subjects; and RE based on a dual-mode curriculum.

A phenomenological perspective as used here refers basically to two approaches of analysing RE curriculum options in public education. Firstly, it refers to the attempt to analyse RE "in ways that do not bring one's own theological or ideological presuppositions" (Smart, 1984, p. 257). Secondly, it refers to methods of thematic comparison aimed at uncovering and presenting forms of RE as a phenomenon (Smart, 1984). More specifically, a phenomenological perspective treats RE curriculum as a phenomenon "in a presuppositionless way, namely through the procedure of bracketing-

out possible distorting pre-conceptions" (Higgins, 1984, p. 258). This perspective is used here to illuminate the some curriculum options highlighted in literature on RE.

It is argued that to conceptualise RE as an educational or religious activity (Grimmitt, 2000b; Hull, 1984, 2007) leads to a variety of curriculum options. In addition, curriculum options can take the form of either confessional or non-confessional RE (Chidester et al, 1994; Grimmitt, 1978; Holm, 1975; Hull, 1984; Shepherd, 1984; Smart, 1998; Summers, 1996; Wood, 1984). These two forms can promote mono-faith or multi-faith RE in different social contexts. It is argued in this study that such curriculum options should be seen as a reflection of different ideologies about RE and its role in public education.

The rest of this section discusses seven curriculum options as part of archaeological analysis of the discourse in RE curriculum theory and practice. The options include: exclusion of RE from public schools; confessional RE; non-confessional RE; RE based on the religious composition of learners; multi-faith RE as a an educational activity; integrating RE with school subjects; and RE based on a dual-mode RE curriculum.

3.3.1   Exclusion of Religious Education from Public Schools

One curriculum option has been the exclusion of RE from public schools, leaving it as the responsibility of the faith-communities and families (Summers, 1996). This option is the case in India, France, and United States of America with the exception of the State of California where it is now taught (Chidester et al., 1994). The main argument for the exclusion of RE is that given the diversity of the religious and non-religious backgrounds of the learners, RE can be "a divisive and not a reconciling force in society" (Summers, 1996, p. 1). In countries like USA there is a "constitutional separation of religion and state" (Carr, 2007, pp. 659-660), leading to the exclusion of the teaching and learning of religion in state or publicly funded schools.

However, it could be argued that RE becomes divisive if the approach is confessional. When RE is offered as an educational, not religious, activity, it can be justified like any

other subject. With a non-confessional approach, the aim is not to promote faith among learners, but knowledge and understanding about religion, by studying actual religions. As such, learners from any faith background can study RE just as they can study geography or history. It is only when RE is conceptualised with a religious intention that it becomes divisive due to different religious convictions. This curriculum option can be described as anti-RE, implying that it is against the inclusion of RE in public education.

The next sub-section discusses the teaching of RE with aim of leading learners to a confession of faith.

3.3.2   Confessional Religious Education in Public Schools

Another curriculum option can be the inclusion of RE in public schools but as a religious activity. This is faith or religious instruction given in separate classes based on the faith, religion, or denomination of the learners and taught by teachers or outsiders who belong to that faith or denomination (King, 1984; Summers, 1996). This option is based on the learning-religion-approach (Grimmitt, 2000; Hull, 2007). It is, therefore, confessional RE, aiming at leading the learners to a confession of faith or helping them to grow in faith. Hull (2007, p. 2) observes that:

> Learning religion describes the situation where a single religious tradition
> is taught as the religious education curriculum and is taught from the
> inside so to speak. The teachers are expected to be believers in the religion
> themselves and the object of the instruction is to enable pupils to come to
> believe in the religion or to strengthen their commitment to it. This type of
> religious education may be described as proceeding from faith to faith.

This RE curriculum option has two versions. Where RE is based on one religion, it has been described as single-tradition. On the other hand, where many religions are taught as separate subjects, RE is described as "multiple single-tradition" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 42). However, where one religion is taught at the exclusion of other religions, RE can be criticised for segregation against other religions, more especially in a democratic and religiously diverse society. On the other hand, where many religions are taught but

separately, RE can be criticised for posing the danger of creating "religious apartheid" (Summers, 1996, p. 11) in the school. The main criticism here is that RE should not be offered with the aim of promoting faith among learners since "it is the business of each religion to ensure its own transmission to the next generation" (Hull, 2007, p. 5), not of the public school.

In the next sub-section, I discuss the teaching of religion with the aim of promoting, among learners, knowledge and understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life.

3.3.3   Non-Confessional Religious Education in Public Schools

A third curriculum option can be the inclusion of mono-faith RE in public schools as an educational activity, but based on one perceived major religion or faith in a given society at the exclusion of other religions or faiths. This option is described as single-faith or single-tradition RE (Chidester et al., 1994). However, although its conception is educational, the exclusion of other faiths makes it narrow in perspective. As such, it is not very attractive on educational grounds, and can easily be criticised as confessional or neo-confessional RE (Grimmitt, 1978; Holm, 1975; Wood, 1984). The term 'neo-confessional' here denotes a new form of confession in that although the obvert concern is not to lead learners to a confession of faith; the intention is to promote knowledge of one faith, by excluding other faiths. Such exclusion can lead to a confession of faith taught in the school.

The teaching of BK in secondary schools in Malawi, since independence in 1964 up to present, has been based on the perception that Christianity is the predominant religion in Malawi. Although not confessional in approach, it can be argued that BK promotes exclusivism in RE. Thus, although it is non-denominational and has objectives that are educationally worthwhile, its exclusivism renders its educational value less attractive in a pluralistic society. Furthermore, the fact that other religions are excluded may be seen as

an attempt at converting the learners: a new or modified form of confessional RE; hence the term neo-confessional RE.

The next sub-section discusses the teaching of religion according the faith composition of the learners.

3.3.4   Religious Education Based on the Religious Composition of   Learners

A fourth curriculum option relates to the inclusion of RE in public schools, as an educational activity, based on the faith or religious composition of the learners in each school community (Summers, 1996; Smart, 1998). For example, where learners in the school come from a Christian and Muslim background, the RE curriculum would draw its content from Christianity and Islam. The criticism here could be that such a curriculum would lead to differentiation and lack of uniformity of RE within one national education system, despite the intention being educational, not religious. The agreed RE syllabuses of England and Wales would be a good example here (Read et al., 1992).

It is also possible to offer this option as a religious activity. For instance, instruction in a faith offered by members of particular faith-communities or denominations to their learner-members in schools would be an example of teaching religion based on the religious affiliations of the learners and for the purposes of promoting faith.

In the next sub-section, I discuss the teaching of religion with the aim of promoting religious literacy (Slattery, 2006) among learners by drawing from many religions or faith-traditions instead of one.

3.3.5   Multi-Faith Religious Education as an Educational Activity

A fifth curriculum option is the inclusion of RE in public schools as an educational activity, based on a multi-faith syllabus, with content drawn from many religions. The aim is to help learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion as an

important social phenomenon by studying many religions. It does not attempt "to convert students to any particular religion or to elevate one religion above another" (Summers, 1996, p. 12). This option is also described as multi-tradition RE (Chidester et al., 1994; Smart, 1998), and is based on non-confessional approach (Carr, 2007; Grimmitt, 2000; Hull, 2007).

From a perspective of critical pedagogy (Ferreira, 2008), multi-faith RE can be seen as one of the strategies meant to promote understanding among people of different faiths and cultures. It can be crucial for cultivating dialogue across difference, celebrating human differences, and promoting unity in diversity. Thus, multi-faith RE resonates with other strategies associated with critical pedagogy initiatives such as critical multiculturalism (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995; May 1999), anti-racist education (McCarthy, 1998; Ng, 1995), and multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In the main, critical pedagogy initiatives aim to develop resources for promoting dialogue across difference, whether ethnic, racial or religious, in ways that foster understanding, co-existence and social justice (Ferreira, 2008).

However, since there are many religions in the world, a multi-faith curriculum cannot include all the religions. This is why it is based on selected religions. One example can be multi-faith RE based on the study of the world religions, namely Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. One can argue that emphasis on world religions has the potential to marginalize primal religions, leading to a possible *religioncide*[29] of the marginalized religions. There is therefore need to balance the inclusion of world and primal religions in the curriculum. For instance, in some African countries, African Religion forms part of multi-faith RE curriculum. The multi-faith curricula of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia are good examples here (Waddington, 1996). Similarly, the RME syllabus in Malawi is an example of multi-faith RE based on Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion, with a component on moral education (Ministry of Education, 1998).

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[29] I coined the term to denote the death or extinction of primal religions under the hegemony of world religions.

The next sub-section discusses the teaching of religion through integration with other subjects in the school.

3.3.6   Integrating Religious Education with Other School Subjects

Another curriculum option recently proposed by Carr (2007, p. 670) is that of RE linked or integrated "with other school subjects in arts, humanities and sciences". It criticises the teaching of RE as a separate subject in the school curriculum without showing any meaningful links with other school subjects. For Carr (2007, p. 671), an integrated RE curriculum promotes religious literacy, which enables learners to have a "better understanding of the positive spiritual value and moral meaning that many have found in religious faith." I argue here that religious literacy should also include knowledge and understanding of the potential of any religious faith to be abused by some people in promoting evil in society.

A good example of abuse of religious faith can be the various ways in which religion has been dangerously implicated in global and political conflicts as a result of blind and irrational commitment to religious dogma or doctrine (Dawkins, 2006; Grayling, 2007; Hitchens, 2007; McGrath, 2007). Another instance can be noted in variants of fundamentalism operating in many parts of the world such as the Middle East, Africa, South East Asia, and the Indian subcontinent (Habermas, 2008). The argument here is that for an integrated curriculum option, linking RE with other subjects can be important in promoting more educationally religious literacy. It can also have the potential to promote a holistic view of religion as an important dimension of human and social life. To that effect, Carr (2007, pp. 670-671) argues that offering RE as a separate subject

> is inappropriate for the general run of pupils – precisely in so far as this serves to undermine or obscure understanding of the relevance of religious study to other studies and vice versa.

One insight here is that, pedagogically, this curriculum option calls for "collaboration with teachers of arts and humanities, to develop programmes of integrated or

interdisciplinary work in which such meaningful links are visible" (Carr, 2006, p. 671).
Thus, integration may be a case for the development of pedagogical approaches that serve
to make connections between various school subjects more conspicuous. In the case of
Malawi, the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi does not
integrate religion with other subjects. In South Africa, Religion in Life Orientation
(Steyn, 2004) can be seen as an example of such integration. Multi-faith RE is
incorporated into the Life Orientation curriculum where issues of personal and social
development, health promotion, Arts and Cultures and Social Sciences are included
(Steyn, 2004).

The last sub-section discusses the teaching of religion based on two parallel syllabi.

3.3.7   Religious Education Based on a Dual-Mode Curriculum

Another curriculum option is that described as dual-mode RE, based on two different
syllabi: one mono-faith and the other multi-faith. Such a curriculum option reflects
different demands for RE as well ideological contradictions in terms of aims of RE. As
such, it can be described as intellectually messy, compromising and less coherent as to
what is its theory of education (Fullan, 1993, 2007). Nonetheless, this curriculum option
can be described as more politically correct because, despite the educational
contradictions it creates, it can provide a win-win situation for people with competing
ideologies of teaching RE in schools (as discussed in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.1.2). The
dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi can be an example here. It
has been described as a compromise between the competing demands for RE between the
Christian and Muslim faith-communities.

The next section continues the archaeological analysis of RE curriculum theory and
practice. It explores some of the factors highlighted in literature as critical in shaping RE
curriculum theory and practice. The curriculum options, discussed above, are, in one way
or another, influenced by a combination of some of these factors.

3.4 Influences on Religious Education Curriculum Theory and Practice

This section examines some imperatives highlighted in literature as having the potential to influence RE curriculum theory and practice. As part of archaeological analysis of the discourse in RE curriculum theory and practice, possible sources of influence shaping RE curriculum theory and practice are discussed. This examination foregrounds six possible sources of influence namely: developments in education, theological developments, social changes, plurality of society, religious affiliations of a country, and historical tradition of a country.

One argument here is that factors shaping RE curriculum vary from one state education to another and from country to country. It is, therefore, difficult to formulate an exhaustive global perspective of factors that may influence the way in which RE is conceptualised and practised. However, a discussion of some commonly cited factors can give a general picture, which can be used to analyse the influences shaping the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi.

The next sub-section begins the discussion with developments in education and their possible impact on RE curriculum theory and practice, as highlighted in literature reviewed.

3.4.1 Developments in Education

This section discusses developments in education as a possible source of influence shaping RE curriculum theory and practice. Changes taking place in educational in general have had an impact on the way RE is conceptualised. For instance, the work of some philosophers of education, like Peters (1966), Hirst and Peters (1970), and Hirst (1974, 1984), has contributed to the need for a change from confessional to non-confessional RE (Carr, 2007). The claim of these theorists of education is that for any subject to be included in the school curriculum, it must be justified on educational

grounds. By justification on educational grounds, they mean that any subject must contribute in a unique way to the aims of public education. This unique contribution can be made by helping learners to develop critical knowledge and understanding of the world and society in which they live.

Recogising the importance of developments in education, for instance, Grimmitt (1987, p. 104) observes that changes have occurred "as a result of accommodating new insights from developmental psychology, child-centred theories of education and from the philosophy of education." With such developments in philosophy and psychology of education, scholars of RE found it imperative to justify the inclusion of RE on sound educational grounds. Here ter Haar (1990, p. 127) observes that modern developments in education "have not only affected the content of religious education but also influenced the applied methods." It is argued in this study that the changes from mono-faith to multi-faith RE as well as the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum in Malawi reflect developments in pedagogical posturing in RE.

On philosophy of education, Peters (1966) argues that education is concerned with initiating learners into what is worthwhile. This includes specific modes of thought and awareness such as science, history, mathematics, religious and aesthetic awareness together with moral, prudential and technical forms of thought and action. Peters (1966) further argues that it is the capacity of a mode of thought and awareness (a subject) to contribute valuably and uniquely to the child's cognitive, emotional, social, or physical development that constitutes its educational validity.

From a curriculum perspective, Grimmitt (1978) observes that developments in curriculum studies have also influenced RE curriculum theory and practice. The influence has led to the demand that prior to teaching anything, we must decide on a number of educational objectives to be achieved through our teaching. This ensures that what is taught is educationally worthwhile and that we are able to evaluate success of our teaching by observing what the learners are able to do. Another related curriculum development is the growing demand for integration among different subjects (Carr,

2007). Grimmitt (1978) argues that there are strong reasons for rejecting the division of knowledge into superficial areas. All these changes have had an influence on RE curriculum theory and practice, which traditionally have focused on leading learners to a confession of faith or strengthening the learners' faith (Hull, 1984).

The next sub-section discusses theological changes as another possible source of influence shaping RE curriculum theory and practice.

3.4.2 Theological Developments

In this sub-section I discuss and argue that theology, like all other academic disciplines, has been subjected to a great deal of developments in the twentieth century. These developments have been in keeping with the revolutionary and critical character of the present age. For instance, there have been theological works like the new radical theology (Bultmann, 1960; Tillich, 1962a, 1962b), popularized by Robinson (1963) and the resultant honest-to-God debate. Central to this new radical theology is the calling into question of the usefulness of the traditional framework through which the Christian faith has expressed itself over the ages. It also questions the validity of those theological concepts upon which the whole of Christian doctrine rests (Robinson, 1967).

The death of God of theology (Altizer & Hamilton, 1968; van Buren, 1963) perhaps best illustrates the radical nature of theology in the twentieth century. Its argument starts from the premise that God is dead. It is designed to expose both the ineffectiveness and irrelevance of traditional ways of speaking about God in contemporary modern or post-modern society. It, therefore, calls for the task of redefining God and the Gospel (van Buren, 1963) in a way that corresponds with the thought forms, language and experiences of humankind in contemporary society. For instance, Bultmann (1960) argues for the need to demythologise the New Testament account of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. For Bultmann (1960) this means abandoning miracle stories, demons, nativity and resurrection accounts as historical facts so that the central message of Christianity may speak to contemporary people in their present existential situation.

This type of theologising had the effect of throwing doubt upon the value of teaching children traditional Christian thought forms. The new theology considered these thought forms as hindrances to understanding Christianity in the present age. Central to the new theology was the concern to communicate religious concepts in a way that has meaning for people. These theological developments had influence on the way RE was to be reconceptualised to make it relevant to learners. Cases of learners rejecting the Christian faith as meaningless were cited to bear out this assertion (Grimmitt, 1978). Thus, the change from RE as a religious activity to RE as an educational activity also drew its inspiration from such theological developments. This theological perspective mainly obtains in countries following western educational thought (Chidester et al., 1994).

The next sub-section discusses social changes that have influenced and shaped RE curriculum theory and practice from an archaeological perspective.

3.4.3 Social Changes

In this section, I argue that apart from developments in education and theology, some notable social changes have also occurred. One of the social changes influencing RE curriculum theory and practice stems from science. Science has greatly changed our view of the universe. Due to technological advances, the world is increasingly becoming one global village. Consequently, we are more aware of events occurring in parts of the world far away from us. It is impossible to live in isolation, unaware of what other people feel, think, and do. Globalisation has made us conscious of those people with life styles different from our own. Our society has increasingly become multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-faith. As such, globalisation requires a global perspective on life. Accordingly, RE should broaden and deepen this universal perspective (Smart, 1998). RE should be used as a resource to promote mutual tolerance and respect among people of different backgrounds in a pluralistic society (Steyn, 2004).

Another social change relates to the process of secularisation. This has led to the separation of religion and the state in the provision of social services (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). Secularisation is used here to denote the declining influence of religion in shaping and guiding the human actions, reactions and interactions in society (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991). Due to secularisation, the influence of religion on public policy has been drastically curtailed. This has had an influence on RE curriculum theory and practice to reflect the degree of secularization in contemporary society.

The dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary school in Malawi could be seen as a result of such secularisation. The inclusion of RE in the school curriculum is no longer to be justified on religious but educational grounds. The aim is no longer sacred, promoting faith among the learners. Instead, RE is secular, promoting critical knowledge and understanding of religion as a dimension of human and social life.

In the next sub-section, I discuss the religious diversity of society as another critical factor that can shape the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice.

3.4.4 Plurality of Society

A fourth factor influencing changes in RE curriculum theory and practice "is the growing plurality of society" (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001, p. 77). As a result of globalisation and developments in communication technology, people of different cultures are no longer living in isolation from one another. Instead, there is increasing intermingling of people from a diversity of cultures within the same geographical area (Smart, 1998). At a deeper level, plurality can be understood as the multiplicity of ideologies or values in our society, which make people experience the world as fragmentary and contradictory (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). Thus, since multiple cultures now come together in the same physical areas, it is necessary to develop adequate ways of interacting with persons belonging to other cultures. This necessity has led to changes in the way RE has to be conceptualised (Carr, 2007; Slattery, 2006), and is one of the arguments for the change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE in Malawi. As observed by Chidester et al., (1994,

p.45) "educators in Malawi perceived that exclusively Christian programmes in religious instruction were not suitable for a religiously plural society." It was that need for change that led to the introduction of RME as a multi-faith syllabus in 2000 and of the dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001.

The next sub-section discusses how religious affiliations can shape RE curriculum theory and practice in a country.

3.4.5   Religious Affiliations of a Country

A fifth factor influencing RE curriculum theory and practice relates to religious affiliations of a society (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). Religious affiliations can refer to whether a society is mono-religious (mono-faith) or multi-religious (multi-faith) in its social composition. Members of the society might belong to one religion or to diverse religions. The former is difficult to come by in its very strict sense given the rate at which societies are becoming pluralistic and globalised. It is, however, possible to have a society that is predominantly mono-religious.

For instance, Greece is considered mono-religious in that the country is predominantly Greek Orthodox and the state RE curriculum is based on Greek Orthodox religion (Hull, 2007). Thus, countries like Greece have a high probability of offering a mono-faith RE curriculum in their public schools, although this may be suitable where RE is conceptualised as a religious, not educational, activity. On the other hand, there are countries with a religiously diverse social-composition and the state RE curriculum is designed to reflect that reality. A good example here is the RE curriculum for the United Kingdom (England and Wales) where an Agreed Syllabus is offered (Kay, 2000). Commenting on the pluralistic nature of the United Kingdom, Hull (2007, p. 1) observes that:

> there has been a pluralistic Christian tradition since 1869 and a significant
> multi-religious presence since WWII. While religious education was
> initially non-denominational Christian in England, a multi-faith approach

gradually developed and, according to the 1994 Religious Education
Model Syllabuses, six major world religions are now taught.

Thus, the presence of many faith traditions within one nation is an important factor to influence a shift from mono-faith to multi-faith RE. This was also one of the reasons for RE curriculum change in Malawi. RME as a multi-faith syllabus was designed to reflect "the three major religions of Malawi, namely, Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions" (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. iv).

The next sub-section illuminates how the historical tradition of a country may shape RE curriculum theory and practice.

3.4.6 Historical Tradition of a Country

A sixth factor that can influence RE curriculum theory and practice is the historical tradition of a country. The history of a country can have great influence on the form of RE. Commenting on RE in Germany, Hull (2007, p. 1) observes that:

> Because Roman Catholicism and Protestantism were more or less equally present in most of the German provinces…religious education in the state schools took either a Protestant or Catholic form. The appearance of large numbers of foreign nationals in Germany has challenged this system. Additionally, the incorporation of the former provinces of East Germany, where church traditions were weakened under the communist government, led to the emergence of various patterns of multi-faith religious education combined with education in ethics and values.

Furthermore, in several countries of post-colonial Africa, the RE curriculum is influenced by a legacy of their colonial history. The 19th century Christian missionaries saw no value in the African Traditional Religions. These religions were, therefore, excluded from the RE curriculum since its prime concern was to initiate the learners into the Christian faith and help them to grow in it (King, 1984). This was the case throughout the colonial period in Africa as colonial governments supported the RE introduced by the Christian missionaries. Even after independence, RE in many sub-Saharan African states was firmly Christian (King, 1984). This situation was equally true for RE in Malawi.

However, due to the influence of the multi-faith RE movement, in some African countries, there has been a growing understanding and appreciation that African Traditional Religions should form part of the RE curriculum for public education (Hull, 2007; Waddington, 1996). For instance, countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi, have reconceptualised the RE curriculum to reflect their local context. Hull (2007, p. 2) observes that:

> the recent and more positive evaluation of primal religions [African Traditional Religions] is leading to the introduction of these traditions into religious education, often accompanied by an expansion of the Christian curriculum to include other world religions, e.g. Botswana.

Commenting on the influence of different historical conditions on RE, ter Haar (1990, p. 146) observes that RE in Nigeria is "an amalgam of three parallel systems of education: the traditional, the Islamic and the western type, often bound in an uneasy relationship." The argument here is that differences in RE curriculum theory and practice can be, partly, a result of different historical circumstances.

In the case of Malawi, the history of education has had an impact on RE curriculum theory and practice. Since western formal schooling was introduced by the Christian missionaries, the Christian faith dominated the RE curriculum. The aim was to promote faith among learners. From the late 1980s, there has been a movement away from mono-faith to multi-faith, leading to the present dual-mode RE curriculum based on BK syllabus and RME syllabus. However, as is reflected in the theorising of my research findings in Chapters Eight and Nine, resistance to multi-faith RE in Malawi is still influenced by the fact that RE has largely been mono-faith and Christian in character for a long time.

This section has discussed some factors that can shape RE curriculum theory and practice, with some reference to Malawi's RE curriculum. The next section highlights my critical reflections on RE curriculum theory and practice, within Malawi's context and as informed by the Foucauldian notion of archaeology.

3.5   Critical Reflections

Each of the RE curriculum options discussed in this chapter can be examined for its educational value and be criticised from the point of view of other educational positions. Different RE curriculum options are underpinned by different assumptions. Such assumptions have implications for curriculum policy negotiation between governments as policy-makers and other stakeholders in education. It was after considering a number of curriculum options that the Ministry of Education in Malawi adopted the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001. This study was conducted as an exploration of how and why the dual-mode RE curriculum was understood by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities.

Furthermore, it has been argued that, the two RE spaces of the dual-mode curriculum promote different theories and practices of RE. Ontologically, the mono-faith space perceives only one religion as the appropriate one to be taught in schools. Epistemologically, the mono-faith space involves acquisition of knowledge and understanding of one religion, and methodologically, it is exclusivist, limited and closed in its approach to the study of religion. On the other hand, the multi-faith space reflects ontology of religion where many religions are perceived as appropriate for RE curriculum content. Its epistemology promotes acquisition of knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon by studying more than one religion. Methodologically, it allows for a free, open and comparative study of religions.

Thus, theoretically, the dual-mode curriculum can be seen as an attempt to shift from exclusivism in RE where only one religion is taught to a blending of exclusivism and inclucivism/pluralism. Exclusivism reflects the conception of RE as means for the transmission of faith among learners. RE is not taught as an educational activity (Hull, 1984). This is reflected in the mono-faith space of BK. On the other hand, the inclusion of the multi-faith space reflects an attempt to promote inclusivism/pluralism in RE, responding to the needs of a religiously diverse and democratic society. By exploring the

understandings regarding this curriculum policy change, the study has illustrated another perspective in the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice.

One point to note from this literature review is the apparent paradigmatic shift in RE curriculum theory and practice in many western and some African countries. It is a shift from RE as a religious activity to RE as an educational activity, from confessional to non-confessional RE, and from mono-faith to multi-faith RE. This paradigmatic shift is largely a response to, among other things, the democratic and pluralistic nature that contemporary societies are increasingly becoming. This social change is a notable feature of the new age, created by globalisation, in which people of diverse backgrounds intermingle (Smart, 1998). For RE to remain meaningful, there is need to reconceptualise the curriculum, to be in line with the changing times. Commenting on the changes in RE curriculum theory and practice in some African countries, King (1984, p. 11) observes that

> the trend is for RE to cease to be exclusively Christian and to reflect more African traditional values and modern indigenous philosophies and to draw material from Islam and Hinduism in countries where these religions are significant. The trend is also for RE to be more concerned with helping pupils to clarify values, to make moral decisions, and to understand religious ways of thinking, in order to equip them better for adult life in their societies, where religion is an important factor socially, politically and culturally.

With this change, RE can favour a multi-faith study of religion. This is because RE is no longer viewed as a tool for promoting faith among learners. Rather, the aim is to help learners understand religion as social phenomenon or learn from religion moral and spiritual values for their individuation and humanisation (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). As Carr (2007) observes, the aim is to promote better understanding of the positive spiritual and moral values that many people have found in religion. However, critical attention should also be given to the potential for religion to be used by some people to promote conflicts and other social evils (Dawkins, 2006; Grayling, 2007; Hitchens, 2007; McGrath, 2007). The next section, presents a summary of Chapter Three.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has located the study within the existing body of literature. Using archaeological analysis, the main debates, issues and trends in RE curriculum theory and practice have been analysed and discussed. The claim is that there is no universally accepted conception of RE curriculum. Instead, the conception varies from country to country. The debates, issues, and trends in RE are a manifestation of the discourse in RE curriculum theory and practice. They also reflect competing influences and ideologies about RE. The dual-mode RE curriculum policy for secondary schools in Malawi should be understood as part of that discourse. It is a discourse framed within the context of Malawi's influences and ideologies. The understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change provide empirical evidence for this claim.[30]

The next chapter maps out the analytical route of the study, foregrounding its theoretical and conceptual framework.

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[30] As interpreted and theorised in Chapter Six, Seven, Eight and Nine.

Chapter Four

Mapping the Analytical Route

Religious education is in need of a new interpretation and new school practices in order to remain meaningful in our present culture[31]

4.1   Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to map out the analytical route of the study. It discusses a theoretical and conceptual framework deployed to describe, analyse, and theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary school schools in Malawi. The term framework is used to refer to a structure of theories or concepts, which provides guidance for research. The chapter, therefore, presents an analytical framework within which to interpret and theorise the research findings. As the opening quotation of this chapter states (Wardekker & Miedema, 2007), there is a need of new interpretation and new school practices of RE for the subject to remain meaningful in our present contemporary society. It is the central argument of this chapter that the analytical framework discussed here can be a possible way of proposing such new interpretation and school practices of RE, not only for Malawi but globally as well.

Some scholars (Lieher & Smith, 1999) attempt to make a distinction between a theoretical and conceptual framework. A conceptual framework is described as a structure of concepts and/or theories which are pulled together as a map for the study while a theoretical framework is described as a structure of theory or theories which already exists in literature, a ready-made map for the study (Lieher & Smith, 1999). Ball (2006, p. 1), on the other hand, describes a theoretical or conceptual framework as "a set of possibilities for thinking with." This study uses the expression theoretical framework for theory and the expression conceptual framework for a set of concepts.

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[31] Wardekker & Miedema, 2007, p. 76.

My contention here is that whatever the distinction, the fundamental function of a theoretical or conceptual framework is to serve as an analytical tool-box in describing, analysing and theorising a phenomenon under study. Thus, proceeding from this perspective, I have employed eclecticism to choose and combine selectively theoretical and conceptual constructions relevant for the job at hand (Doll, 1993).

This chapter appraises one theory and an amalgam of concepts used as an analytical tool-box, to generate fresh insights (Dressman, 2008) about the dual-mode RE curriculum. More specifically, this framework has provided the lenses through which to look at and make meaning of the contesting spaces reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. It has provided me with "a general sense of reference" and "directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1969, p. 148). As Colebrook (2000) cited by Ball (2006, p. 2) argues, part of the exercise of analysing data is about "appraising concepts as possibilities for future thinking." Thus, this chapter appraises the concepts that have been used to theorise the research findings as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

In theorising the findings, I have synthesised the commonalities and differences among the themes reflecting the understandings regarding the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change (see Chapters Six through to Nine). The goal has been to make a contribution to knowledge, by arguing that the understandings reflect spaces of contestation in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, and should be understood as a manifestation of politics of the school curriculum. The argument is that politics has an influence on the way the policy change is understood in Malawi at the three levels or nodes of the secondary school head teachers, Ministry of Education officials, and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities.

In the next section, I discuss a deconstructive perspective as used in this study to analyse and theorise the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.

4.2 A Deconstructive Perspective

As a phenomenological study, a deconstructive perspective (Derrida, 1976) has been employed as a form of critical analysis and theorising to challenge the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. Deconstruction is one of the many perspectives of the post-modern philosophy which contests the dominance of the modern worldview by positing in the main "that humanity can and must go beyond the modern" (Jencks, 1992, p. 10). Slattery (2006, p. 22) argues that post-modern philosophy "provides an option for understanding the current debates in education and society." As a philosophical construct, deconstruction perceives reality as socially and culturally constructed and interrogates these constructed texts (Caputo, 1997a; Miedema & Biesta, 2004). It seeks to challenge and unmask issues that are taken for granted and as given in our social life. Here Atkinson (2003, p. 37) argues that,

> The effect of a deconstructive approach is to question the assumed educational, theoretical or moral superiority of particular worldviews or dominant paradigms in educational research and practice.

Furthermore Slattery (2006, p. 24) argues that deconstruction can be used to "provide alternative ways of thinking and imagining." I have, therefore, used deconstruction to help in envisioning and proposing a theoretical construction that should inform the theory and practice of Religious Education appropriate for a democratic and religiously diverse society like that of Malawi (see Chapter Eight).

Another aspect of deconstruction is that pointed out by Foucault as cited by Ransom (1997, p. 89) that things "can be unmade as long as long we know how it was they were made". Thus, one way of exploring the understandings regarding the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change is by unmaking the assumptions underpinning such understandings. For example, for the Ministry of Education officials and secondary school head teachers, this could be the theory of education and the faith communities, their theological stances.

Since deconstruction "explores the contradictions within modern paradigms and symbols (especially language) for the purpose of exposing the injustices that emerge from the relationship between power and language" (Slattery, 2006, p. 26), I have used it to serve the purpose of exposing the contradictions of having a dual-mode Religious Education curriculum in a democratic and religiously diverse society. By so doing, the understandings regarding the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi have been challenged to illuminate the spaces of contestation. For the purposes of this study, the intention in employing a deconstructive approach is fourfold.

Firstly, I have employed a deconstructive approach, to challenge the assumptions underpinning the understandings regarding the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, as expressed by the three research participants' categories. The assumptions range across theoretical, epistemological, and methodological issues with regard to the dual-mode curriculum policy. As such, deconstruction has enabled me to question the positive and negative understandings regarding, as expressed by head teachers, Ministry of Education officials, and faith-community leaders**.**

Secondly, the importance of deconstruction, as a post-modern philosophy, is to "provide alternative ways of thinking and imagining"(Slattery, 2006, p. 24). Thus, although the tone is generally critical, my intention is to be reflexive in challenging the understandings with the aim of proposing a theoretical construction that should inform a curriculum of Religious Education appropriate for a society that is democratic and religiously diverse.

Thirdly, since deconstruction "explores the contradictions within modern paradigms and symbols (especially language) for the purpose of exposing the injustices that emerge from the relationship between power and language" (Slattery, 2006, p. 26), a deconstructive approach has been used to expose the contradictions embedded within the dual-mode RE curriculum itself in the context of a democracy and religious pluralism. Thus, deconstruction has been used to illuminate the spaces of contestation in the dual-mode

curriculum policy change as reflection of politics of the school curriculum in so far as they contest or attempt to influence the conduct of Religious Education in schools.

Fourthly, another dimension of deconstruction employed in this study is Foucault's notion, as cited by Ransom (1997, p. 89), that things "can be unmade as long as long we know how it was they were made". This notion has been used as an attempt to unmake and reconceptualise the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi in the context of democracy and religious diversity. The assumption here is that a balanced curriculum should respond to the context-specific and global needs of the society it serves.

Thus, I argue that deconstructive perspective has enabled me to explore, be critical of and deconstruct the phenomenon of the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi. This is done by focusing on the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy, using the limited and bounded perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) of The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders as well as my own limited and bounded perspective as a researcher. The subsequent discussion is based on one theory and three concepts, namely, the theory of politics of the school curriculum, the concepts of policy change, public theology of religions, and confessional and non-confessional RE.

The next section presents a discussion of politics of the school curriculum as applied in this study.

4.3   Theory of Politics of the School Curriculum

The overriding theoretical assumption driving this study is that of politics of the school curriculum. With this assumption, different contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change have been theorised as a reflection

of politics of the school curriculum. This is why a theory of politics of the school curriculum has been employed to describe, analyse, and theorise the research findings.

At any national level, policy can be described as a tool used by the government to shape and guide the conduct of affairs in a country, which Gordon (1991, p. 2) describes as "the conduct of conduct". In this sense policy constitutes a critical component of the discourse of the state. As such, it "is by its very nature political and must be understood as part and parcel of the political structure of society and as a form of political action" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 71). This is why it is argued in this study that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy as well as the contesting spaces in the curriculum policy change, reflected in the understandings by the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, are a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

As a theoretical orientation, politics of the school curriculum is difficult to pin down with precision. There are various possible readings and renderings of what might count as politics of the school curriculum, as evidenced by a variety of theorists. For instance, Lawton (1980) observes that politics of the school curriculum is not about party politics and the curriculum but about the question of controlling the school curriculum. Jansen (1993) argues that curriculum is essentially political with political limits to curriculum reform, creating a need for political compromise for any curriculum policy change to be successful. Glatthorn et al (2006) describe politics of the school curriculum as an attempt by various social actors to influence the conduct of education in the school whilst Bertram et al (2000) talk of opposition to curriculum innovation by powerful groups of people in society. Furthermore, whilst Apple (2008, p. 241) conceptualises education "as a political act", Sutton and Levinson (2001) describe a school curriculum as government's mandate and contested cultural resource, which diverse social actors, across all levels of society, purposefully contest. For Kelly (1999) politics of the school curriculum implies that any curriculum is   a contested terrain, reflecting competing ideologies.

In general, under the rubric of politics of the school curriculum, a number of scholars describe curriculum as a hotly contested space (Apple, 2008, 2004; Bertram,

Fotheringham, & Harley, 2000; Chisholm, 2005; Cornbleth, 1990; Christie, 1999; Glatthorn et al., 2006; Jansen, 1993; Kelly 1999; Lawton, 1980, 1983; Malcolm, 1999; Marsh & Willis, 1995; Matheson, 2004; McNeil, 2006; Ozga & Lingard, 2007; Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Thomas, 1983). Thus, like many theories, the theory of politics of school curriculum incorporates a wide spectrum of opinions. This chapter has just isolated those aspects that have a direct application to the study in theorising the research findings.

More illuminating for this study is Thomas's (1983) conceptualisation of politics of the school curriculum as struggles over education by members of opposed social groups. Using social dichotomies theory, Thomas (1983) describes the struggles over education support and access using five binaries of social groups: upper versus lower class; urban versus rural; ethnic majorities versus ethnic minorities, politically favoured versus politically disadvantaged regions; and religious majority versus religious minority. In the main, the theory maintains that usually in the struggles, "the favoured member of the pair is seeking to maintain its present superior position while the disadvantaged member of the pair is striving for at least equal treatment" (Thomas, p. 10).

In the case of Malawi, the controversy that arose when the Ministry of Education introduced multi-faith RE (RME) to replace the old mono-faith RE (BK) could reflect one of such struggles in education. For instance, whilst the Christian faith-communities opposed multi-faith RE and supported mono-faith RE, the Muslim faith-community opposed mono-faith RE and supported multi-faith RE. It can be observed here that the Christian faith-communities, as a religious majority, were striving to maintain mono-faith RE since it was based on the Bible and their faith-tradition at the exclusion of other faith-traditions. On the other hand, the Muslim faith-community, as a religious minority, felt disadvantaged by mono-faith RE and chose to support multi-faith RE as a way of striving for equal treatment in RE curriculum theory and practice.

A general predisposition of politics of the school curriculum is that different people contest, influence or attempt to influence the conduct of education in the school for various reasons and according to their ideologies (Apple, 2004; Chisholm, 2005;

Cornbleth, 1990; Glatthorn et al., 2006; Iannaconne, 1983; Lawton, 1980, 1983; McNeil, 2006; Thomas, 1983). Since a curriculum is a means by which education is delivered in society, politics of the school curriculum is in essence politics of education (Ozga & Lingard, 2007). Individuals and groups seek to achieve their goals and use perceived differences, coupled with the motivation to use power or influence, to protect their interests in education. This politics can be played out, among other things, with respect to four usual but critical curriculum questions such as those asked by Bishop (1985): What Knowledge should be taught? Why should it be taught? How should it be taught? Where should it be taught? Answers to these questions are influenced by a number of factors, including people's beliefs and values about education. Thus, educational ideologies play an important role in politics of the school curriculum. This is because different demands placed upon the school curriculum are underpinned by ideological considerations. Through such demands, different people propose and contest different answers to curriculum questions, rendering the curriculum "a battleground for many competing influences and ideologies" (Kelly, 1999, p. 167).

Apple (2008) argues that to see education as a political act, we need to think relationally and ask a set of questions different from the usual curricular questions. Such questions have the strength to reveal the political nature of education. For instance, whose knowledge is this? How did this knowledge become official? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and who does not? What can we do as critical educators "to change existing educational and social inequalities and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just" (Apple, 2008, p. 241). The argument here is that applying these questions to RE curriculum theory and practice reveals the political nature of RE for public schools. By extension, the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi portray education as a political act and a hotly contested terrain (Apple, 2008; Kelly, 1999).

Commenting on the political nature of curriculum negotiation, McNeil (2006, p. 223) observes that curriculum "decision making is a political process. Different pressure groups are proposing competing values about what to teach." This notion of politics of

the school curriculum has been used in this study to theorise the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change and the various ways in which it is understood as a reflection of competing demands and values for RE.

One insight is that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change came in as a consequence of a political process in which different pressure groups made different demands and proposed competing values about what to teach as RE in secondary schools in Malawi. Another insight is that the contesting spaces were an expression of different demands and values about RE. From this theoretical position, the different voices about the perceived value of the dual-mode RE curriculum expressed by the research participants have been theorised as politics of the school curriculum.

The substantive claim of the study is that at an ideological level, different people understand the value of a curriculum differently. The study describes the areas of disagreement about the value of any curriculum as contesting spaces. This is why the research findings have been theorised as contesting spaces in curriculum policy change, reflecting politics of the school curriculum.

The rest of this section discusses the selected aspects of politics of the school curriculum applied in this study. These aspects have been used to theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum as manifesting different aspects of the theory of politics of the school curriculum. In the next section I explain how a curriculum is a confluence of demands by different people in society.

4.3.1   Curriculum as a Confluence of Demands by Diverse Social Actors

Literature on politics of the school curriculum reflects a growing awareness and recognition that what is taught in the school is influenced by demands from diverse social actors (Broadfoot, Brock, & Tulasiewicz, 1981; Christie, 1999; Cornbleth, 1990; Glatthorn et al., 2006; Iannaconne, 1983; Lawton, 1980; Marsh & Willis, 1995; Thomas, 1983). From time to time, people firmly express and make known their collective or

individual views about education in schools. The views vary according to people's specific underlying value orientations and demands (Christie, 1999; Cornbleth, 1990). Such varying views press demands upon the school in terms of: What should be taught? How, why, and where it should be taught? In view of such demands, a curriculum is described as a confluence of demands by diverse social actors.

The dual-mode RE curriculum has been theorised as a confluence of different demands for RE in Malawi. Similarly, the contesting spaces in the understandings by the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders have been theorised as an expression of different value orientations about the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Thus, while some understandings portray the policy change as an asset, other understandings portray it as a liability (as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven). The next section discusses how curriculum is at the same time government's mandate and contested cultural resource, reflecting politics of the school curriculum.

4.3.2   Curriculum as Government's Mandate and Contested Cultural Resource

Another aspect of politics of the school curriculum acknowledges that education operates within an environment of politics and conducts transactions with several groups that populate the same ecological setting (Broadfoot et al., 1981; Thomas, 1983). Although it is the mandate of government to formulate and implement curriculum policy in society, the curriculum becomes a contested cultural resource, which different people purposefully oppose (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Since curriculum policy serves as a blueprint or a plan (Kelly, 1999) by which education is delivered in society, it is not surprising that a curriculum is subject to contestation (Ozga & Lingard, 2007).

Thus, politics of the school curriculum is played out in different ways depending on the social context in which education operates (Cornbleth, 1990). Education systems reflect people's views about the kind of society they want. Since such views are varied and sometimes conflicting, curriculum becomes a contested cultural resource (Matheson, 2004; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). This implies that education has social or cultural roots

and is bound to differ from one society to another and from one period to another. Any particular form education takes is relative to its social location and context. In that sense, education reflects the worldviews or values of particular societies. It is relative to the context in which it is practised (Tedla, 1995).

By exploring the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, using the perspectives of the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, the study has sought to illuminate how the policy change is government's mandate as well as a contested cultural resource. The different understandings have been theorised as contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, reflecting politics of the school curriculum.

Foregrounding politics of the school curriculum, Malcom (1999, p. 87) observes that:

> Setting out what a nation thinks all students should learn is a major political exercise. It is a direct statement of what the society believes schooling is all about.

Thus, drawing on Malcom's (1999) view above, this study has theorised the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a direct statement of what Malawi believes RE in public schools should be all about. The curriculum accommodates two spaces for the BK syllabus and the RME syllabus. The claim here is that while the dual-mode RE curriculum policy states that schools should offer both BK and RME as optional subjects, various social actors understand its value differently. The various understandings illuminate that while it is the mandate of government to formulate any curriculum policy, various social actors can and do contest it. In the process, the policy becomes is contested cultural resource.

Furthermore, embedded within the notion of curriculum as a contested cultural resource (Sutton & Levinson, 2001) is the view that curriculum is not neutral but essentially political (Bertram et al., 2000; Iannaconne, 1983; Lawton, 1980, 1983; Matheson, 2004; Winch & Gingell, 1999). The study applies this view in arguing that the different

understandings by the research participants reflect different ideological positions in relation to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy. The contestation reflects the non-neutrality and political nature of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

In addition, since curriculum is a contested cultural resource, it is acknowledged that politics of the school curriculum calls for a political compromise for any curriculum policy change, reform, or innovation to be successful (Jansen, 1993). Drawing on this view, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change can be understood as a political compromise, accommodating different demands by supporters of mono-faith and multi-faith RE. More specifically, some of the understandings by the research participants portray the policy change as a curriculum compromise between the Muslim and Christian faith-communities.[32] In the next section, I discuss the theory of politics of the school curriculum as reflected by ideologies of dominant groups in society. This is done with reference to the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi.

4.3.3   Curriculum as a Reflection of Dominant Ideologies

Another aspect of politics of the school curriculum is that curriculum is influenced by ideologies usually of dominant, influential or powerful groups in society (Apple, 2008, 2004; Bertram et al., 2000; Kelly, 1999; Matheson, 2004; Meighan, 1986; Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Schwab, 1969; Vincent, 1995). The concept of curriculum as ideology posits that different ideologies by different groups of people influence the curriculum whether at the level of theory (policy) or practice. Bertram et al., (2000, p. 20) observe that usually it is the powerful and influential people in society who determine 'what knowledge, skills, and values are important for the learners in that society to know and have." From this perspective, the dual-mode RE curriculum reflects what the powerful, influential and dominant people in Malawi think about what RE should be for secondary schools. Among such dominant people are Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders.

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[32] As discussed in Chapter Six, Sub-section 6.2.1.3

Meighan (1986, p. 174) describes the concept ideology as:

> a broad interlocked set of ideas and beliefs about the world held by a
> group of people that they demonstrate in both behaviour and conversation
> to various audiences. These systems of belief are usually seen as 'the way
> things really are' by the groups holding them, and they become the taken-
> for-granted way of making sense of the world.

This understanding of ideology has been used to illuminate how the research participants understand the value of RE for public schools.[33]

In addition, Kelly (1999) describes ideology as a set of beliefs and values which guide people's actions, interactions and reactions in society. The claim here is that any curriculum reflects some beliefs and values about what people think should be the theory or practice of education. This is why a curriculum is said not to be neutral but political, ideological, and socially constructed and negotiated (Garfinkel, 2003; Gergen, 2003). As such, ideologies have effects not only on the way curriculum is developed but also on how different people understand its value in society. Fourez (1988) observes that ideologies structure perceptions, legitimate and promote patterns of action, worldviews and values. On the other hand, Cross (1997) argues that ideologies are demonstrated in people's behaviour or conversation while Knain (2001) observes that ideologies can influence or regulate people's worldview, discourse, what is said and the manner in which it is said, as well as interpretation of utterances. Fairclough (1995, p. 23) also observes that there are "connections between language, power and ideology." Thus ideological analysis can be used to generate fresh insights about the language and power of various groups of people as they influence or attempt to influence the conduct of education in the school.

The notion of curriculum as an ideology has been used to theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The assumption is that the understandings, by the Ministry of Education officials, secondary

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[33] This is theorised in Chapter Eight, Section 8.2

school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, are informed by some ideologies about education in general and RE in particular.

In the next section, I discuss hegemony as another dimension of politics of the school curriculum reflected in the contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi.

4.3.4   The Concept of Hegemony

Another aspect of politics of the school curriculum used in this study relates to the concept of hegemony in education. The conceptual definition of hegemony literally refers to domination which can be manifested in several spheres of life such as culture, politics, economics, and ideologies or values and beliefs (McLaren, 1998; Slattery, 2006). Hegemony connects with the concept of power. Hegemony or domination is practised by some people who have power on other people with relative powerlessness (Fairclough, 1995).

Furthermore, the notion of hegemony relates to the desire to dominate or resist domination. Gramsci (1971) describes hegemony as dominance by the ruling class achieved by gaining the approval and consent of members of the society. In a sense, hegemony is "largely achieved not through the use of force, but by persuading the population to accept the political and moral values of the ruling class" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991, p. 155). My take is that hegemony is characterised by the struggle for domination or continued domination by those in a position of power and the struggle against domination by those in a position of relative powerlessness.

In using this concept, the study argues that the desire to dominate or end domination seemed to underpin some of the contesting spaces reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change[34]. By portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum as an asset for Malawi, the dominant position of the Christian faith in the school curriculum was accepted as normal. To that extent, it can be seen as a form of

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[34] This is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven

persuading members of the society to accept the political and moral values of those people supporting the hegemony of the Christian faith in the RE curriculum.

McLaren (1998, pp. 173-175) as cited by Slattery (2006, p. 38) aptly elaborates the concept of hegemony as follows:

> Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by sheer exercise of force, but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family. By social practices, I refer to what people say or do. Social forms refer to the principles that provide and give legitimacy to specific social practices. …Hegemony is the struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression. … Hegemony is not a process of active domination as much as an active structuring of the culture and experiences of the subordinate class by the dominant class. … It is an image in which the values and beliefs of the dominant class appear so correct that to reject them would be unnatural, a violation of common sense.

McLaren's (1998) view above brings together many dimensions of domination. First, it is domination by force. Second, it is domination through socially agreed-upon practices, forms, and structures. Thirdly, it reflects the struggle between those people in a position of power and those in a position of relative powerlessness. Fourthly, the powerful seek to maintain domination while those with relative powerlessness seek to end their being dominated. A fifth dimension is that hegemony normalises values and beliefs of the powerful, which are accepted as correct, while rejecting and excluding values and beliefs of the dominated – people in a position of relative powerlessness.

The study has applied this notion of hegemony to theorise the privileged space for the Christian faith provided in the dual-mode RE curriculum[35]. In that privileged space, Christianity is exclusively taught in the mono-faith space, through the BK syllabus. In addition, Christianity is also covered in the multi-faith space of the RME syllabus alongside Islam and African Traditional Religions. Thus, through the lens of hegemony,

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[35] As theorised in Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.1

the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change have been analysed and deconstructed to unmask the privileged space for Christianity.

Furthermore, McLaren's (1998) conception of hegemony, as a struggle in which the powerful win consent of the oppressed with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their oppression, needs some modification. It is possible to have instances of domination where the oppressed knowingly participate in their own oppression only that their state of relative powerlessness incapacitates them to act otherwise.

This modified understanding of hegemony has been used to analyse the privileged curriculum space enjoyed by the Christian faith in Malawi in relation to other faiths. For instance, the Muslim faith-community is aware that their religion has been excluded in the school curriculum for a long time and that even now, with the inclusion of Islam in the RME syllabus, Christianity continues to enjoy a privileged space and dominate other faiths. The argument here is that hegemony by one religion in RE is a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

The next section discusses a Foucauldian concept of governmentality as part of the conceptual framework, supplementing the theory of politics of the school curriculum. It highlights contestation of the formulation and implementation of curriculum policy.

4.3.5   The Concept of Governmentality

Another aspect of politics of the school curriculum relates to the Foucauldian concept of *governmentality* (Foucault, 1991). For Foucault (1991), governmentality refers to a "form of activity aimed to guide and shape conduct" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 25). On the other hand, Gordon (1991, p. 2) defines governmentality as the "conduct of conduct". As a theoretical lens, Doherty (2007) describes governmentality as a prism that illuminates a particular stratum of enquiry, a perspective that examines, with a historical gaze, the activity of governing as deliberate and purposeful, directed at the subject, the society, or

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some consciously categorised subdivision of the social body. Central to these various descriptions of governmentality is the notion of governing.

In this study, governmentality is used to denote the activity of formulating and implementing policy to guide and shape the conduct of education in the school. In this sense, governmentality provides the lens through which to see politics of the school curriculum as reflected in the various ways in which educational policy change is valued and understood.

Another aspect of educational governmentality is that, in the field of curriculum studies, as in other fields, "the nature of policy formulation and implementation varies according to the political and organizational structures within which it takes place" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 92). The claim here is that, in the context of Malawi, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was informed by the political pressures of the time. Furthermore, the essence of the various understandings about the value of the dual-mode RE reflects contesting spaces in the governmentality of RE for secondary schools in Malawi.

From the above discussion, four main senses of governmentality of education in relation to politics of the school curriculum can be summarised. Firstly, governmentality can involve people contesting any curriculum policy or the conduct of education in the school. Secondly, people can influence or seek to influence any curriculum or the conduct of education. A third sense of governmentality is that people can contest the formulation and implementation of policy to maintain or resist hegemony (domination) in the curriculum or conduct of education. Fourthly, the notion of governmentality can also reflect that people understand (interpret) differently the value of any curriculum policy formulation and implementation. The argument is that governmentality in these four senses has been reflected, in one way or another, in the contesting spaces regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.

Furthermore, since the unit of analysis of this study is the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, the above four

senses of governmentality have been employed to theorise the various ways in which the curriculum policy change was understood by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. Central to politics of the school curriculum, as used in this study, is the conception that includes various understandings that people may have about the value of any curriculum policy change. The overarching claim is that the different understandings about the dual-mode RE curriculum are a reflection of politics of the school curriculum in which the governmentality of RE in Malawi is contested[36].

The next section discusses the concept of policy change as part of the analytical tool used in this study.

4.4   The Concept of Policy Change

The concept of policy change has been used to supplement the theory of politics of the school curriculum in analysing the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Firstly, the notion that policy carries different meanings for different people from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice (Ball, 1994; Odden, 1991) has been applied. It implies that policy change is subject to different interpretations at different levels of society. Put simply, different people at different levels of the society may understand curriculum policy differently.

Secondly, the study has drawn on Fullan's (1993, 2007) notion that any curriculum reform initiative must have both a theory of education and action. In other words, it must clearly state what it seeks to do at an educational level and how the reform is to be enacted. Thus, there should be a theory of education underpinning the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. This notion has been used to interrogate the theory and unmask the educational contradictions of the dual-mode RE curriculum. The study argues that since the mono-faith and multi-faith spaces of the dual-mode RE curriculum have

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[36] As discussed in Chapter Nine, Section 9.3.1

different ontology, epistemology, and methodology, educational contradictions are created, reflecting politics of the school curriculum.

Thirdly, the study has drawn on Darling-Hammond's (1998) notion of the difficulty faced in getting policy change beyond bureaucracy. In the main, Darling-Hammond (1998) observes that while policy change is inevitable for any society, it is difficult to get the intended change beyond bureaucracy. This difficulty is because, among other things, policy is additive, layered and filtered (Elmore, 1996). As a proposed policy change moves from the policy-making (bureaucracy) level to the level of implementation, its original meaning gets filtered, new and different meanings get added to it at different layers of society. This notion is used to theorise the different understandings portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an asset and/or liability (see Chapters Six and Seven). The study argues that the understandings do not only reflect the difficulty of getting policy change beyond bureaucracy but also politics of the school curriculum.

Fourthly, it is recognised that there are some misconceptions about education policy change as aptly elaborated by Elmore (1996, p. xxx) below:

> Education reform policy typically embodies three distinctive conceits: (a) that the newest set of reform policies automatically takes precedence over all previous policies under which the system has operated; (b) that reform policies emanate from a single level of the education system and embody a single message about what schools should do differently; and (c) that reform policies should operate in more or less the same way in whatever settings they are implemented.

The observation above has been applied to the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Three points can be raised with respect to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy. Firstly, the introduction of the policy change in 2001 did not automatically take precedence over the previous curriculum. The mono-faith approach which started since the beginning of western formal education in Malawi, by the Christian missionaries in the 1870s, (as discussed in Chapter Two), has also been accommodated in the dual-mode RE curriculum. In fact, in most secondary

schools BK, as a mono-faith syllabus, continues to be offered at the exclusion of RME as a multi-faith syllabus. This exclusion has been theorised as a contesting space in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, reflecting politics of the school curriculum, where BK is preferred to RME.

Secondly, some contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change seem to reflect the misconception that the dual-mode curriculum emanated as an imposition from above under political pressure to accommodate other religions apart from Christianity. One interpretation is that it was an attempt by the then Muslim president to Islamise Malawi[37]. This view ignores the role played by many social actors and stakeholders in policy formulation as well as curriculum changes that had already taken place in primary teacher training colleges and primary schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[38]

Thirdly, variations in the way schools were making decisions and choices in implementing the dual-mode RE was understood by some research participants as lack of uniformity in curriculum implementation. Such variations were taken as a factor negating or minimising the value of the curriculum policy change. They were understood as a negative response to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, not as possible and positive ways of implementing the curriculum.[39]

The next section discusses public theology of religions and how it has been used in this study to supplement the theory of politics of the school curriculum. It illuminates how public theology can influence curriculum governmentality in particular and inform politics of the school curriculum in general.

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[37] This is discussed in Chapter Seven, Sub-section 7.2.1.3
[38] As discussed in Chapter Two
[39] This is illuminated in Chapter Seven, Sub-section 7.2.1.4

4.5   The Concept of Public Theology of Religions

The concept of public theology of religions has been employed in this study to supplement the theory of politics of the school curriculum. The word theology comes from two Greek words: *Theos* meaning god and *Logos* meaning word or measure or reason. Literally, "theology is the practice of reasoning applied to the divine; organised thinking and speaking about God" (Jenkins, 1984, p. 343). Hull (1984b, p. 345) observes that "Theological implications may be found in any aspect of theory, content and method of RE". Thus, any RE curriculum may reflect a theological outlook, although without explicitly teaching theology as part of the curriculum. Similarly, particular methods in RE imply certain theologies (Hull, 1984b). It is, therefore, possible to scrutinise the theological assumptions underpinning any RE curriculum theory and practice.

In the discourse of theology the expression 'public theology' refers to an engagement between theology and politics in specific locations (de Gruchy, 2007). In this sense, public theology influences public policy in various spheres of life. de Gruchy (2007) observes that good practice in public theology and in a democratic society requires promoting the common good by witnessing to the core values rather than seeking privilege for a particular religion. This observation has been used to interrogate the theological assumptions underpinning the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

The expression, 'public theology of religions,' is used to describe a theology of one religion towards other religions. In Christian theological circles, it refers to the theological attitude of Christianity towards other religions (Hick & Hebblethwaite, 1980). The study has appropriated three theological concepts of the "Christian theology of world religions" (Macpherson, 1984, p. 72) namely, theology of *exclusivism, inclusivism* and *pluralism* (D' Costa, 1986). In essence, Christian theology of world religions (or other religions) describes how Christianity views itself and other religions within God's plan of salvation (D' Costa, 1986; Hick & Hebblethwaite, 1980; Knitter, 1985).

This notion of public theology has been applied as part of the analytical tool to theorise the research findings[40]. The assumption is that public theology of religions might have had an influence on the research participants' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum. Using this theological posturing, for instance, the educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change have been theorised as a consequence of differences in public theology between various stakeholders in education. It was such differences that led to two different and contradictory spaces of teaching religion in schools: one mono-faith and the other multi-faith.

Although the theological concepts discussed here originate from Christian circles, their logic has been appropriated and applied in theorising some of the research findings. The aim is to illuminate some theological attitudes towards the inclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum. It is argued that, in general, the existence of different Christian theologies of religions reflects the potential difficulties that can be encountered in coming up with one acceptable RE curriculum.

Including RE as a subject in public schools suggests that religion is considered an important dimension of human and social life, knowledge of which should not be left to chance. This consideration calls for the need to reconceptualise RE curriculum appropriate for public schools serving a pluralistic society. Thus, an examination of the interface between public theology and educational policy can illuminate theological attitudes affecting RE curriculum theory and practice. Commenting on RE and Christian theology in general, Gray (1984, p. 76) observes that:

> Christian theology on the whole has not yet come to grips with what
> religious education should, or can be, in the community schools of mixed
> and growingly secular society.

It should be stated upfront that the concepts of theology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism have been applied as elaborated by D' Costa (1986) in his book *Theology and*

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[40] As theorised in Chapter Eight

religious pluralism. D' Costa's focus is on Christian theology in the context of religious pluralism, emphasising the theological attitudes of Christianity toward other religions in the world. It is in this sense that the concept of public theology of religions has been used in this study. This sense differs from the way the concepts of exclusion, inclusion, and pluralism are used without an explicitly stated theological stance. For instance, in multicultural education (Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2004) and inclusive education (Topping & Maloney, 2005), the terms exclusion, inclusion and pluralism are used in a secular sense. Their use is based on principles of equity and social justice in education without any (explicitly stated) theological assumptions. This is not to imply that equity and social justice are not theological issues. Rather, it is to draw a distinction between theological and secular usage of the concepts.

The next three sections give an elaboration of the theology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, as part of the conceptual framework and analytical tool of the study. In general, the claim is that theological attitudes of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism may underpin the contesting spaces reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.

4.5.1   Theology of Exclusivism

A Christian theology of exclusivism (D'Costa, 1986) posits that, in relation to other religions or faiths, salvation is found only in Christianity. The saving acts and workings of God are not found in the other religions (Kraemer 1938, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960, 1962). Hendrik Kraemer is the leading exponent of theology of exclusivism (D'Costa, 1986).The claim of this theological position is that there is no salvation outside the Church (D' Costa 1986; Hick 1980; Hick & Hebblethwaite 1980). It maintains that "other religions are marked by humankind's fundamental sinfulness and are, therefore, erroneous, and that Christ (or Christianity) offers the only valid path to salvation" (D' Costa, 1986, p. 52). With this view of other religions, Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all people. As such, Christianity cannot recognise any other religion beside itself as of equal right (D'Costa, 1986).

It can be pointed out here that, prior to the Second Vatican Council, an extreme version of the theology of exclusivism by the Roman Catholic Church was that there was no salvation outside the Church. The term Church meant the Roman Catholic Church. This view, however, changed after the Second Vatican Council, with the adoption of a somewhat inclusivist theological posturing (McBrien, 1980). The change was largely because of the theological influence of Karl Rahner (1966, 1978), who became increasingly identified as a modern spokesperson "for modern Catholic theology" (D' Costa, 1986, p. 83).

Applying the theology of exclusivism to the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy, the study argues that social actors practising their religion on the basis of this theology might find it difficult to accept the inclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum on an equal basis. Consequently, such people may not understand the value of a multi-faith RE curriculum. Instead, they may likely support a mono-faith RE curriculum based on their religion only. This is because other religions are not accepted as valid religious claims in their own right and space according this theology of exclusivism (D'Costa, 1986). Thus, a multi-faith RE curriculum is likely to be contested.

This logic of theology of exclusivism has been applied, in particular, to the contesting spaces in the understandings by faith-community leaders because of the influence of their public theology in education[41]. The contention is that the Christian faith-communities' opposition to the RME, as a multi-faith syllabus, is informed by a theology of exclusivism. This is because the RME syllabus includes other religions apart from Christianity. The overt preference for BK to RME has been theorised as an expression of exclusivism in RE curriculum theory and practice.

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[41] As theorised in Chapter Eight, Subsection 8.2.1.1

The next subsection discusses a theology of inclusivism as a possible ideological underpinning informing some of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

4.5.2   Theology of Inclusivism

The Christian theology of inclusivism (D'Costa, 1986) maintains that salvation can also be found in the other religions apart from Christianity. With this theology, "Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all [people], which cannot recognize any other religion as of equal right" (Rahner, 1961, p. 118). It, however, accepts other religions as positive paths of gaining the right relationship with God and attaining salvation but Christianity is seen as the best or perfect path and "the fulfillment of other paths" (D' Costa, 1986, p. 22). It does not reject anything that is true and holy in the other religions but "affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God" (D' Costa, 1986, p. 80).

Karl Rahner (1966, 1978) is one of the leading exponents of this theology and maintains that in principle, it is perfectly possible for non-Christian religions to be lawful means of mediating God's grace. Rahner (1966, p. 121) observes that:

> a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a lawful religion (although) only in different degrees), without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it.

 In the same vein, devout members of the non-Christian religions are described as "anonymous Christians" (D'Costa, 1986, p. 87). With this understanding, other religions are accepted and included within God's plan of salvation although Christianity assumes an elevated status as a means of salvation in relation to other religions (D' Costa, 1986).

My contention is that it is possible for people with this theological attitude to open dialogue with members of other religions. As observed by Sookrajh and Salanjira (2009,

p. 19), people "conceptualising the teaching of religion in public schools on the basis of the theology of inclusivism can accept giving some space to other religions in the RE curriculum." For such people, the inclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum can be accepted so long as their religion is given some prominence or privileged space. Its weakness is that it promotes a feeling of superiority for one faith over other faiths. However, it can accept and promote an inclusivist and multi-faith, rather than an exclusivist and mono-faith, RE curriculum theory and practice.

The theology of inclusivism has been used to theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The insistence by the Christian faith-communities that BK should continue beside the multi-faith syllabus of RME can be seen as a reflection of this theology. Thus, since Christianity is perceived as the best means of gaining salvation, it has to be offered in the mono-faith space under BK. In addition, Christianity is included together with other religions namely, Islam and African Tradition Religions, in the multi-faith space under the RME syllabus. It can be argued that, in a sense, the Christian faith is given a privileged space as a perceived dominant religion in Malawi[42].

The next subsection discusses a theology of pluralism as a possible ideological underpinning informing some of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

4.5.3   Theology of Pluralism

The Christian theology of pluralism (D'Costa, 1986) maintains that there is one God who is Maker and Lord of all. In God's infinite fullness and richness of being, God exceeds all human attempts to grasp God in thoughts. All the devout people in the various religions do in fact worship that one God but through different, overlapping concepts or mental images of God (Hick, 1980). The other faiths are accepted as valid religious truth claims

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[42] This is theorised in Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.1

in their own right and space. D' Costa (1986, p. 22) observes that a theology of pluralism maintains that:

> other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God, and Christianity's claim that it is the only path (exclusivism), or the fulfillment of other paths (Inclusivism), should be rejected for good theological and phenomenological reasons.

John Hick (1977, 1980) is among the leading exponents of this theology and argues that people can come to the perception of religious pluralism through a 'Copernican revolution' in their theology of religions. Through this revolution, Christians can realise that, just as Copernicus realised that the sun is the center of the universe, God is also the center of the universe of religions (Hick, 1980). Thus, through a theology of pluralism and a Copernican revolution, Hick (1977, p. 131) proposes a:

> shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that it is God who is at the centre, and that all religions…including our own, serve and revolve around [God].

In this analogy, God is the sun, the originative source of light and life, which all religions reflect in their different ways (D'Costa 1986).

My contention is that people using this theology may not find it difficult to enter into a genuine dialogue with people of other religions. Religious pluralism (Ross, 1992) would not be difficult to accommodate in RE curriculum theory and practice. A multi-faith RE curriculum would not be difficult to understand and negotiate in terms of what it seeks to achieve in a pluralistic and religiously diverse society. Thus, in the context of Malawi, the replacement of BK as a mono-faith syllabus with RME as a multi-faith syllabus would not have been a problem.

However, the fact that both BK and RME have been placed side by side in the dual-mode RE curriculum reflects the difficulty of negotiating for one RE curriculum which speaks to the religious plurality of contemporary Malawi. The pluralist theology of religions has

been used to theorise some of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change[43].

The next section explains confessional and non-confessional approaches to RE as part of the study's analytical tool.

4.6   Confessional and Non-Confessional Religious Education

To further supplement the theory politics of the school curriculum, the concepts of confessional and non-confessional RE (Carr, 2007) have been used. A confessional approach is based on the conception of RE as a religious activity. In this approach, learners are expected to participate in the beliefs and practices of the religion being taught. This has been the traditional view of RE with the aim of leading the learners to a confession of and commitment to faith (Grimmitt, 2000b; Hull, 2007; Wood, 1984). Learners are either initiated into a faith and/or helped to grow in that faith. Commenting on this confessional approach, Hull (1984, p. 284) observes that:

> it is probably safe to say that in all past societies and most present day
> societies religious education has been understood as that process of
> teaching and learning by means of which religions have sought for their
> transmission and self perpetuation.

This means that the traditional view by faith-communities is for RE to serve their need of promoting faith among learners. The development of critical thinking about religion in society is neglected. Instead, the faith-communities view RE as means of generating loyal members among the learners to perpetuate the faith-community's influence in society. A case of this traditional view has been highlighted in Chapter Two where the history of RE in Malawi shows how the Christian missionaries used RE as a means of evangelisation. This traditional view was also reflected in some of the faith-communities' understandings

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[43] As theorised in Chapter Eight, Sub-section 8.2.1.3

regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change[44]. The confessional approach is also described by Grimmitt (2000a) and Hull (2007) as the learning-religion approach.

It can, therefore, be argued that the confessional approach would be problematic in contemporary society where the public school is serving learners coming from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. Such an approach would likely make the RE curriculum "a divisive and not a reconciling force in society" (Summers, 1996, p. 11). This divisiveness is mainly because only one religion is chosen over other religions. However, it would be an expensive, if not a difficult, enterprise to undertake, if an attempt was made to accommodate all religions present in a given society. For one thing, it would entail offering a mono-faith syllabus for each religion. As such, some decision has to be made about which religions should included in the school curriculum. Such a decision will depend on a number of factors (as discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.4).

On the other hand, the non-confessional approach (Carr, 2007) conceptualises RE as an educational activity. The intention is to help learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion, what it means to be a member of religion, and how religion affects the world and the society in which we live (Grimmitt, 2000a; Holm, 1975, Hull, 2007; Smart, 1998). This approach puts emphasis on religion as an important social phenomenon and dimension of life (Smart, 1998). It captures aspects of the two approaches described by Hull (2007) as "learning-about-religion" and "learning-from-religion" (as discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.2.3).

Thus, this study argues that the non-confessional approach has the potential to promote multi-faith RE curriculum theory and practice. Its educational merit lies in its potential to help learners develop life skills such as cultural literacy, civil toleration of differences, greater understanding of self and others, and the clarification of values. These life skills are important for the human development of the learners, described as "the humanisation of the pupil" (Hull, 2007, p. 4). In this approach, the purpose of RE is education, not faith. The concern of RE curriculum theory and practice is to help learners develop

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[44] This is theorised in Chapter Eight, Sub-section 8.2.2

critical knowledge and understanding of the world from a religious perspective (Read, Rudge, Teece, & Howarth, 1992; Smart, 1984, 1998). For Slattery (2006), the concern is religious literacy.

It can be argued that although mono-faith RE can take a non-confessional approach, its narrow perspective in the midst of many faiths would be one of its main criticisms. Multi-faith RE would, therefore, render a non-confessional approach more credible in a democratic and religiously diverse society than mono-faith RE.

Thus, within the overarching theory of politics of the school curriculum, the concepts of confessional and non-confessional RE have been used to theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum. The contention is that contesting spaces reflected in the research participants' understandings are in themselves a reflection of ideological differences between people supporting the confessional approach and those supporting the non-confessional approach.

The next section presents a summary of Chapter Four.

4.7   Chapter Summary

This chapter has mapped the analytical route of the study by discussing and justifying the theoretical and conceptual framework employed to theorise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. It has argued for an expanded understanding of politics of the school curriculum – one that goes beyond the influence of the conduct of education in the school to the various ideological assumptions underlying such influence on the curriculum. It also includes the contesting spaces in the various ways in which people may understand or interpret the value of a curriculum. In terms of fieldwork, the analytical framework provided the sensitising concepts that oriented the exploration of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi.

In particular,   a theory of politics of the school curriculum is foregrounded as an overarching theoretical framework. An eclectic amalgam of concepts has been employed to expand the framework, comprising policy change; public theology of religions; and confessional and non-confessional RE. This framework has provided the lenses through which the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE have been analysed and interpreted. The main claim is that the understandings reflect politics of the school curriculum in which the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is under contestation. Such contestation reflects ideological underpinnings, which can be theorised as a manifestation of public theology of religions as well as confessional and non-confessional conception of RE.

The next chapter discusses and justifies the research design, methodology and methods of data production and analysis used in this study.

Chapter Five

The Methodological Landscape

How you study the world determines what you learn about it[45]

5.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and justify the research design, focussing on the methodology and methods employed to produce and analyse data. This is important because what you learn about the world is influenced by how you study it (Patton, 1990). This is a qualitative study, although some quantitative data has been used to support the interpretive presentation of the findings. The methodological assumption here is that it is possible to interpret quantitative data qualitatively. It should also be pointed, at the outset, that the fact that both qualitative and quantitative data have been used does not make this study a mixed-methods study (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Its qualitative posturing aims at "describing and understanding rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour" (Babbie et al., 2001, p. 53). To that effect, the research design was informed and guided by an interpretivist theoretical orientation (Henning, van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). The intention was to describe, analyse and theorise, in categories or themes, the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, using the perspectives of Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders.

Commenting on the work of qualitative researchers who process, analyse, organise, and present their qualitative findings in categories, Constas (1993) observes that, the researchers make all sorts of choices in creating research studies and methods. However, Constas (1993) further argues that, for the most part, qualitative researchers are not good at sharing these decisions and the rationales for the presentations of their work. As such, their work becomes vulnerable to the criticism of method-reporting deficit (Constas, 1993). One of the goals of this chapter is to avoid the method-reporting deficit, by discussing and

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[45] Patton, 1990, p. 67

justifying the choices made with regard to the research design, methodology and methods of data production and analysis.

The rest of chapter develops the discussion under several sections. Firstly, it discusses and justifies phenomenology as a suitable methodology for this study. Thereafter, a justification of the research participants and sampling procedure is offered. This is followed by a description and discussion of the processes of data production and analysis, justifying the methods employed. A discussion of piloting the study is followed by that of methodological limitations, ending with ethical considerations of the study.

5.2   Phenomenology

From the outset, it is important to distinguish research methodology from research methods (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Swann & Pratt, 2003). The term 'methodology' is employed here to denote an approach to data production or analysis whilst the term 'method' is used to denote a way or technique of data production or analysis (Swann & Pratt, 2003). There is, therefore, a marked difference between methodology as an approach and method as a technique or way of doing something. However, as observed by Swann and Pratt (2003), more recently the term methodology is sometimes, and rather confusingly, used in place of method. For the purposes of this study, I have maintained the difference and used the term methodology for approach and method for technique.

The study has employed a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), to explore the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. In defining phenomenology, Van Manen (1990, p.10) observes that:

> Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some -'thing' what it is - and without which it could not be what it is.

While the above definition offers a condensed notion of phenomenology, there are a number of conceptual senses in which it can been used. It can denote a philosophy as used by Husserl (1967) or an inquiry paradigm (Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 2000),

while Denzin and Lincoln (2000) conceptualise it as an interpretive theory. Another sense conceptualises phenomenology as a research-methods framework (Moustakas, 1994). Still some scholars (Harper, 2000; Schutz, 1967, 1970) conceptualise phenomenology as a social science analytical perspective or orientation while others (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) employ it to denote a major qualitative framework or design.

In addition, phenomenology takes varying forms which complicate its conceptual picture (Patton, 2002). For instance, Schwandt (2001) identifies three distinct forms. The first form is transcendental phenomenology, with a nuanced focus on the essential meanings of individual experience. The second is existential phenomenology, focusing on the social construction of group reality whilst the third, hermeneutical phenomenology, has a nuanced focus on the language and structure of communication.

It is argued in this study that whatever the conceptual sense or nuanced focus, the fundamental concern of phenomenology is to explore "how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as a shared meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Thus phenomenology seeks to explore the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a particular person or group of people (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). It helps to illuminate how research participants perceive a social phenomenon, "describe it, feel about it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Methodologically, this requires a careful and thorough description of how people experience a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Closely related to phenomenology, Sonnemann (1954, p. 344) coined the term phenomenography to denote "a descriptive recording of immediate subjective experience as reported" by the research participants.

Thus, the study has used a phenomenological perspective (Henning et al., 2004) as well as a phenomenographic approach (Patton, 2002) to capture and describe the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a social phenomenon. As van Manen (1990, p. 10) puts it, "Phenomenology is the study of essences." It assumes a commonality in the human

experiences or understandings of a phenomenon under study (Eichelberger, 1989). Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997) observe that:

> In general, phenomenological inquiry is concerned with understanding how people's subjective world is constituted and how people come to interpret their actions and those of others.

Furthermore, it is argued that for phenomenology, it is impossible to measure objectively any aspect of human or social behaviour (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991). This impossibility is due to the fact that people, as social actors, make sense of (interpret) the world by categorising it. Through language, they distinguish between different types of events, actions, objects, and people. They make and express meaning about the events in their social world (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991). It was for this reason that the study was located within an interpretivist paradigm. In particular, the study explored the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change by the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. It sought to illuminate and interrogate the essence of such contesting spaces.

Commenting on the justification for a phenomenological design, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2006, p. 271), observe that:

> Wanting to understand the human experience and how experiences are interpreted differently by different people would certainly be an appropriate reason to conduct a phenomenological study.

The process of categorising the world is subjective since it depends on the opinions of the observer. As such, the most that phenomenology can do is to understand the meaning that individuals give to particular phenomena. "The end product of phenomenological research is an understanding of the meanings employed by members of the society in their everyday life" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991, p. 20). It is for this reason that this methodology was employed in exploring the contesting spaces in the understandings

regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

The intention was to explore how and why the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood by the research participants. In a sense, this was a multi-level policy study (Ball, 2006), seeking to illuminate the essence of the understandings regarding the policy change at the level of the three categories of research participants.

The next section justifies the selection of research participants and sampling procedure.

5.3   Research Participants and Sampling

This section describes three categories of the research participants, why they were selected, and how the sampling was done. In keeping with the key research question, the sample of the study comprised three categories of research participants, namely, Ministry of Education officials, leaders of nationally organised faith-communities, and secondary school head teachers. The selection of these participants was based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under study namely, the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi.

The assumption was that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, as a phenomenon in education, was subject to various interpretations by various social actors depending on their perspectives. Informed by this assumption, the three categories of the research participants were selected to illuminate how and why the policy change was understood. The goal was to illuminate the different meanings the policy change had for the research participants, drawing on the notion that policy carries different meanings for different people from the point of conception to the point of practice and implementation (Ball, 1994; Odden, 1991).

Prior to the actual fieldwork, a letter was sent to the Ministry of Education, requesting permission to conduct research in secondary schools in Malawi. The letter explained the purpose of the study. It also described the research participants to be involved from the Ministry of Education, and the methods of data production to be used. Expected benefits of the study for the Ministry of Education, in particular, and the wider community, in general, were also explained. Similarly, letters were sent to the head offices of the six nationally organised faith-communities and six education divisions involved in this study, seeking their permission and informed consent[46]. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2007 and February 2008.

The next three sub-sections describe the three categories of the elite research participants.

5.3.1   Ministry of Education Officials

Under this category, a purposive sample of Ministry of Education officials was used. These officials were included because of their responsibility in formulating curriculum policy which is passed on to schools for implementation. They were purposively selected for their strategic position as curriculum policy-makers and as bureaucrats whose official duty is not only to formulate policy but also to ensure that policy change gets beyond bureaucracy into practice.

Two assumptions guided the selection of this sample category. Firstly, The Ministry of Education officials were in a strategic position to explain why the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was introduced and how it was getting beyond bureaucracy. As Darling-Hammond (1998) observes, while policy change is inevitable for any society, it is difficult to get beyond bureaucracy. Secondly, as policy-makers, The Ministry of Education officials were deemed to be a rich source of information on the theory underpinning the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. As Fullan (1993) argues, any curriculum change must be informed by a theory of education and should state clearly what it seeks to do in terms of education.

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[46] See Appendix 3

For a purposive sample of The Ministry of Education officials, nine offices participated in the study. One office was that of The Directorate of Education Methods Advisory Services (DEMAS) at The Ministry of Education national head office. This office was selected on the basis of its responsibility for developing curriculum policy and coordinating development of curriculum documents such as syllabuses for both secondary and primary education in Malawi. In addition, the office monitors the implementation of the school curriculum by conducting school inspection and supervision through visits to schools. It was, therefore, assumed that by virtue of their duties and responsibilities, officials from this office would be a rich source of information on why the policy change was introduced, how and why it was understood, from their perspective. Informed consent was obtained from The Director and one research participant.

Another office selected was that of The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) as a national office responsible for the administration of secondary and higher education in Malawi. Again, by virtue of their office, duties and responsibilities, the officials were expected to be a rich source of information on how and why the policy was introduced and what problems were being faced in getting the policy beyond bureaucracy. Informed consent was obtained from The Director and one research participant.

At the education division level, all the six offices of Education Methods Advisory Services (EMAS) were requested to participate in the research. They were selected because of their responsibility for monitoring and supervising the implementation of curriculum within each education division. Malawi's national educational system is currently divided into six education divisions. They include North Education Division (NED), Central East Education Division (CEED), Central West Education Division (CWED), South East Education Division (SEED), South West Education Division (SWED), and Shire Highlands Education Division (SHED). Permission and informed

consent were obtained from the division manger of each office and the representative officials who participated in the research.

Three education divisions, namely, NED, SWED, and SHED had one representative. CEED and SEED had two representatives each while three officials represented CWED. Those offices with more than one representative official felt that the two or three officials would represent their offices better in the interviews since there was no specialist officer responsible for RE curriculum. The officials available, therefore, decided to represent their office and help each other in answering the interview questions.

Finally, the office of RE curriculum specialists, at Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), was requested to participate in the research. MIE is a statutory organisation under The Ministry of Education. It is mandated to develop curriculum and instructional materials. One officer, responsible for coordinating the actual development of RE syllabuses and instructional materials for secondary and primary education in Malawi, became a participant. The curriculum specialist was, therefore, strategically positioned as a rich source of information on why and how the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools was introduced, as well as how and why it was understood. Informed consent and permission were duly obtained.

I should point out here that I had also wanted to include The Directorate of Education Planning (DEP) at the national level because of its responsibility in education planning. But The Director excused the office from the study, observing that it was responsible for educational planning in general at a national level, not for each specific subject area, like RE. As such the office had no idea about RE curriculum theory and practice. Instead DEMAS, DSHE and EMAS were recommended as offices well positioned as policy-makers and bureaucrats on the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

In the end, representatives of nine offices of The Ministry of Education participated in the research, through in-depth interviews. Table 5.1, on the next page, shows the number of Ministry of Education officials (reps) that represented each office. This elite sample

represented The Ministry of Education at both the national level as well as the education division level and was adequate for a qualitative study.

Table 5.1: Purposive Sample of Ministry of Education Officials

Offices	DEMAS	DSHE	NED	CEED	CWED	SEED	SWED	SHED	MIE
REPS	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	1

5.3.2   Leaders of Nationally Organised Faith-Communities

The second category of research participants comprised six leaders of nationally organised faith-communities. This category was also a purposive sample of leaders representing the faith-communities in Malawi. By nationally organised faith-communities, I mean those faith-communities with membership in all parts of Malawi and a national coordinating office. Those faith-communities without members across the country and a national coordinating office were left out despite their interest in RE, just to limit the scope of the study. Another criterion was that the faith-communities had shown public interest in the RE curriculum.

One striking feature of this sample is the absence of leaders of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in Malawi. This is because, in the context of Malawi, there is no national body coordinating Malawian traditional religions. Although traditional chiefs tend to speak on certain traditional practices that associate with ATR, they do so from a cultural perspective, as custodians of traditional culture. Many of them are members of Christianity and some of Islam. For example, during the curriculum consultations that led to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001, three Traditional Authorities (TAs) invited as representatives of ATR (Minutes of First National Consultative Meeting, 2000). All the three chiefs were Christians but supported the traditional beliefs and practices covered in ATR as part of traditional culture. This raises a problem of distinguishing traditional cultural practices and beliefs from those of ATR. I have highlighted this as a possible area of research in Chapter Nine, Section 9.4. In a nutshell, it reflects the decline of ATR in the midst of Christianity and Islam as proselytizing or

converting religions. It was because of that lack of leadership at the national level that I did not find any leaders to represent ATR. Otherwise there are isolated individuals or groups of people who claim to be members of ATR in Malawi. However, these were not deemed suitable participants of the study in the category of national leaders of organised faith-communities. Thus, these members of ATR were excluded due to the study's focus on elite participants and their capacity as national representatives of their respective religions.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the Christian and Muslim faith-community leaders was because, they are organised   at a national level to promote their religious interests. The dominance of the Christian religious groups in the sample is, therefore, a reflection of the current religious composition of Malawi's population as discussed in Chapter One Section 2.1. It also reflects how the various Christian denominations are organised nationally. That national organization is not present for ATR in Malawi.

What follows is a description of the faith-communities whose leaders participated in the study.

One faith-community that participated in the study was The Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM). This is a religious body representing all Muslims in Malawi. It has membership in all parts of Malawi, and a national coordinating office. As a stakeholder in education, MAM owns some private schools and was also involved in the controversy that forced the Ministry of Education to introduce a dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001 (Salanjira, 2003). As such, it was deemed a possible source of information on the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the policy change. Permission and informed consent were obtained from MAM's national office and one representative leader who participated in the research.

A second faith-community was The Malawi Council of Churches (MCC). It is a Christian body representing the main Protestant and non-Charismatic Churches in Malawi, except the Seventh-Day Church, which has its own national representative body. MCC has

membership across the country with a national coordinating office. Most of its member Churches own schools in Malawi either as grant-aided or private schools. It was also involved in the controversy that forced The Ministry of Education to introduce a dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001. Because of its interest in education, it was deemed worthwhile to get MCC's views on the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change through its national office. Permission and informed consent were obtained from MCC's national office. Two representative leaders, instead of one, offered to participate in the interviews as a pair. Their argument was that they were relatively new in their positions of leadership and felt that the two of them would adequately represent their faith-community.

Thirdly, The Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) also participated in the study. It is a Christian body representing the Catholic Church in Malawi and also owns some of the grant-aided and private schools. It was selected as a possible source of information because of its interest in education. ECM was also involved in the controversy that forced The Ministry of Education to introduce a dual-mode RE curriculum policy in 2001. Permission and informed consent were obtained from the national office of ECM and one representative leader who participated in the research.

A fourth faith-community was The Association of Christian Educators in Malawi (ACEM). It is a joint Christian body that came into being in 1994 formed by the Malawi Council of Churches and the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (Lundu & Mwalwenje, 2007). It comprises 19 different Christian Churches from ECM and MCC, charged with the mandate of coordinating activities of the education institutions of the various Churches under the MCC and ECM (Ndalama, 2007). Permission and informed consent were obtained from the national office of ACEM and one representative leader who participated in the research.

Furthermore, The Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM) also participated in the study. This Christian body represents the Pentecostal or Charismatic Churches in Malawi. These Churches are relatively new compared to those under MCC or ECM, which have a

long historical presence, tracing back to the time of the Christian missionaries from the 1870s. As such, not many of the Churches under EAM have schools of their own. They, however, have an interest in education and are part of the resistance to the change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE curriculum. Furthermore, they had participated in the controversy that led to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001. Permission and informed consent were obtained from the national office and the representative leader who participated in the research.

The sixth faith-community was The Seventh-Day Church (SDC) Malawi Union. It is a Christian body representing the Seventh-Day Church in Malawi. It does not belong to any of the above Christian bodies because of some doctrinal differences such as the issue of the Sabbath. Whilst SDC holds Saturday as the Sabbath day, the other Christian bodies observe Sunday as the Sabbath day. It was selected because it has members in all parts of Malawi with a national coordinating office. It also owns some grant-aided and private schools in Malawi. Furthermore, SDC was part of the faith-communities that resisted the introduction of the multi-faith RE curriculum in 2000. It had also participated in the national consultations that led to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001. Permission and informed consent were obtained from SDC's national office and the representative leader who participated in the research.

In all, six faith-communities participated in the study as shown in Table 5.2 below:

Table 5.2: Purposive Sample of Faith-Communities in Malawi

Faith community	MAM	MCC	ECM	ACEM	EAM	SDC
Representative	1	2	1	1	1	1

5.3.3   Secondary School Head Teachers

The third category of research participants comprised 54 secondary school head teachers (principals). It was both a purposive and convenience sample. The sample was purposive in that the head teachers were selected as leaders in making curriculum decisions and

choices at school level, but it was only limited to those head teachers whose schools were offering RE in Malawi. It was also a convenience sample in that I only requested the head teachers who were then studying at Chancellor College[47] and those marking the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations at five centers in Malawi to participate in the study. The head teachers were at locations that were convenient for me to easily access.

One of the strengths of this sampling method was that the sample comprised head teachers drawn from all the six education divisions of Malawi, though not proportionally represented. To that extent, the 54 head teachers, who completed and returned the questionnaire, constituted my convenience and purposive sample that provided information on the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum as well as how and why schools were implementing the policy change.

In all, a purposive and convenience sample of 71 out of a total population of 320 head teachers of secondary schools offering RE at the time of data production[48] was requested to participate in the study. After obtaining their permission and informed consent, a questionnaire was administered to the 71 head teachers, expecting at least a minimum of 51 (72%) head-teachers to complete and return the questionnaire. I managed to collect back questionnaires from 54 (76%) head teachers out of the 71 head teachers. However, one questionnaire was not appropriately completed and was, therefore, left out of the statistical analysis, reducing the number of completed questionnaires to 53 (75%). The total of 53 head teachers was spread according the four types of secondary schools in Malawi as shown in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3: Sample of Head Teachers According to Type of School

Type of school	Government	Grant-aided	Community-day	Private	Total
No of head teachers	20	9	19	5	53

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[47] Chancellor College is one of the constituent colleges of the University of Malawi.
[48] This statistic was obtained from the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) based on the total number of schools that had candidates who sat for BK or RME Junior Certificate Examinations in 2006.

The minimum sample figure of 51 head teachers was arrived at by calculating 40% of 320 head teachers, giving the figure of 128 head teachers. Then, I calculated 40% of 128 head teachers to get the figure of 51 head teachers. This was done to have a manageable sample size. Whilst the figure of 320 or 128 head teachers would have been manageable under some circumstances, it was difficult in my case to have access to such numbers. It was also not necessary for a qualitative study.

My major constraining factors were limited human capacity, time, and finance for travel, food, and accommodation during visits to the various schools in Malawi. However, since the quantitative data, produced with the head teachers, was only required to complement the qualitative data, a minimum sample of 51 head teachers was considered large enough to corroborate views on decisions schools were making with regard to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

The sample of 71 head teachers included 11 head teachers doing their further studies at Chancellor College in 2007, but only eight completed and returned the questionnaire. With the permission from The Ministry of Education and The Malawi National Examinations Board, I also visited centers where teachers were marking Malawi School Certificate examinations in December 2007 and January 2008. The aim was to request those head teachers whose schools were offering RE to complete the questionnaire as shown in Table 5.4 below.

In all, I visited five marking centres where I distributed the questionnaire to 60 head teachers, but only 46 managed to complete and return the questionnaire to me. In the end, I had 54 returned questionnaires which formed the data set from the head teachers. By personally administering and collecting the questionnaires, I was able to have a higher return rate of the questionnaires completed and returned (as shown in Table 5.4, on the next page).

Table 5.4: Purposive and Convenience Sample of Head Teachers Involved in the Study

Head teachers studying at Chancellor College - the University of Malawi	**11** head teachers received the questionnaire	**8** head teachers completed and returned the questionnaire
Head teachers marking national examinations at five centers	**60** head teachers received the questionnaire	**46** head teachers completed and returned the questionnaire
Total	**71** head teachers received the questionnaire	**54** head teachers completed and returned the questionnaire

5.4   Data Production: Process and Methods

Borrowing from the notion of mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2003; Denscombe, 2002; Greene, 2008; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), the study employed three main methods of data generation: in-depth interviews, survey questionnaire, and review of documents (document analysis). These methods were used selectively, not with each category of research participants. I used in-depth interviews with The Ministry of Education officials and faith-community leaders. A survey questionnaire was used with the secondary school head teachers to generate a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data on the understanding regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Document analysis was also used to generate qualitative data to complement the data from the in-depth interviews and survey questionnaire.

The selection of these methods was based on the principles of "mixed methods" (Creswell, 2003, p. 21), and "pragmatism" (Denscombe, 2002, p. 22). However, it should be pointed out that, since not each of the methods was used with all the three categories of the research participants, the study does not qualify as a mixed-methodology study (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2008). The notion is used

here in a very limited sense, to denote the use of different research methods within the same design.

Furthermore, the mixing of the methods was done "on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem" (Creswell, 2003, p. 21). It was, therefore, deemed "useful to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (Creswell, 2003, p. 22) where appropriate. In support of the notion of mixed methods, Bell (2005, p. 115) argues that:

> Methods are selected because they will provide the data you require to produce a complete piece of research. Decisions have to be made about methods that are best for particular purposes and then data-collecting instruments must be designed to do the job.

Commenting on the notion of pragmatism in social research, Denscombe (2002, p. 22) observes that:

> There has been a growing tendency to combine the use of different methods and different research strategies within individual investigations…to achieve the most robust and valuable findings that are possible under the circumstances.

Another view in support of mixing research method comes from Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p. 21) who point out that, "Most good researchers prefer addressing their research questions with any methodological tool available."

Thus, informed by this rich discussion on mixed-methods research, I selected and employed a mixture of methods capable of capturing the participants' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The methods enabled me to produce data about participants' interpretations regarding the curriculum policy change.

 At the level of research participants, triangulation was done by generating data from the three different categories of the research participants namely, The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. Laws, Harper,

and Marcus (2003) observe that the justification for triangulation is to see the same thing from different perspectives.

What follows is a discussion of how and why each method was used to produce the data. The methods include in-depth interviews with Ministry of Education officials and faith-community leaders, review of documents (document analysis), and survey questionnaire with secondary school head teachers.

5.4.1   In-Depth Interviews

Two semi-structured interview schedules were used to conduct in-depth interviews: one schedule with The Ministry of Education officials and the other with the faith-community leaders. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 101) observe that through in-depth interviews, the "researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participants' views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses". Thus, the interviews enabled me to explore the research participants' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Furthermore, the in-depth-interview method is based on a fundamental assumption that the participant's perspective on a social phenomenon under study should unfold as the participant views it (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In anthropological studies, this methodological posturing is described as an *emic* perspective of a social phenomenon (Terre-Blanche et al., 2006). It calls for an understanding of a phenomenon from the point of view of the research participants, not of the researcher. With some modification, this assumption informed the in-depth interviews in this study.

The modification arose in the sense that the interviews were conducted on the basis of some predetermined response categories covering three general topics that guided the direction and flow of the interviews[49]. The interviews sought to illuminate the essence of the understandings by the research participants with regard to the three general topics. The first topic was a background to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001,

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[49] See Appendices 4 and 6

foregrounding its historical and socio-political context. The second topic was on choices about the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change at school level whilst the third was on perceptions, assumptions, and contestations about the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

The above three topics represented three predetermined response categories or *a priori* response categories and my perspective as a researcher. They reflect what is described as the *etic* perspective, calling for an understanding of the phenomenon from the point of view of the researcher (Terre-Blanche et al., 2006). Thus, the in-depth interviews for this study combined both the *emic* and *etic* perspectives in the sense that interviewees gave their understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change using their limited and bounded perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) but following the topics predetermined by the researcher. This situation can also be described as co-production of data between the researcher and research participants, the interviewer and interviewees (Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003).

I found the use of a semi-structured interview schedule appropriate because I wanted to get the participants' interpretations but based on the issues I had chosen. As such, there was need to have a guide on issues to explore with each interviewee. So, although each interviewee gave the interpretation from their own perspective, the issues covered in the interviews were similar. By so doing, the interviews enabled me to generate data in quantity quickly. In addition they provided me with the opportunity to understand the meanings that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change had for the interviewees and why.

In addition, on the conduct of the interview, Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 101) observe that a "degree of systematization in questioning may be necessary … when many participants are interviewed..." Thus, the interview guide provided the basis for that systematisation. It enabled me to explore the three general topics with the research participants while respecting how they framed and structured their responses. Kahn and Cannell (1957, p. 149) describe interviewing as "a conversation with a purpose". The

purpose in this study was to get the interviewees to speak about their understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

To get the interviewees to describe their understandings, I explained and assisted them to understand that their views were valuable and useful for an understanding of the dual-mode RE curriculum in Malawi. The participants were given the option to have the interview in the local language Chichewa or in English, but all preferred to have the interview in English. This preference for English to the local language was mainly because all participants were elites with a good grounding in English.

The interviews took place at the respective offices of the research participants. On average, the interviews lasted for a period of one hour. The shortest was 45 minutes and the longest was one hour 15 minutes. I obtained permission and informed consent from the participants for me to tape-record the interviews, which I finally transcribed. One tape-recorded interview took about eight hours to transcribe.

5.4.1.1   In-Depth Interviews with Ministry of Education Officials

In-depth interviews were conducted with officials representing the nine offices of The Ministry of Education. These included officials from two Directorate Offices at The Ministry of Education headquarters (DEMAS and DSHE), the six Education Division Offices in Malawi (NED, CEED, CWED, SEED, SWED, and SHED) and Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) as a curriculum development unit. As curriculum policy-makers, the officials were interviewed for their understanding of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. A semi-structured interview schedule with three main themes was used.[50]

The next sub-section describes interviews with six nationally organised faith-community leaders in Malawi.

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[50] See Appendix 4

5.4.1.2.   In-Depth Interviews with Faith-Communities Leaders

 A semi-structured interview schedule guided the interviews with the representatives of the six nationally organised faith-community leaders (MAM, MCC, ECM, ACEM, EAM and SDC), as stakeholders in education with a particular interest in the provision of RE in schools. That interest in RE was largely informed by the need to transmit and propagate their faith among the learners.[51] By implication, their public theology had an influence on public policy in education. In all, six in-depth interviews were conducted, guided by three main themes.[52]

The next sub-section discusses and justifies document analysis as another data-generation method used in this study.

5.4.2   Review of Documents

Document analysis of both primary and secondary sources was another method used to generate qualitative data. The documentary data was particularly valuable in answering the question about the historical and socio-political context regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 107) observe that, for "every qualitative study, data on the background and historical context are gathered" to understand the social phenomenon under study within its context. Thus, the documentary data generated was used to construct a historical and socio-political context within which the research participants' understandings were to be understood (see Chapter Two). The documents analysed included both primary and secondary sources as discussed in sub-sections 5.4.2.1 and 5.4.2.2 below.

5.4.2.1 Primary Sources

Under primary sources, a variety of primary documents was reviewed. Among them were minutes of the "National Consultative Committee" meetings on the RME controversy between the faith-communities and The Ministry of Education between 2000 and 2001

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[51] As discussed in Chapter Two
[52] See Appendix 6

(O'Dala, 2001, p. 2). I got copies of the minutes from one of the Christian faith-communities. The minutes had valuable data on the rationale for and resistance to the change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE curriculum. The positions of the government and faith-communities on these two approaches of RE were also articulated in these minutes. In addition, the minutes also highlighted the consultative process leading to the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy in 2001.

Another valuable primary source was a circular letter by The Ministry of Education to the main stakeholders in education in Malawi, announcing the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001(O'Dala, 2001, pp. 1-3). The letter articulated the position of the government on how to proceed with the provision of RE in secondary schools in Malawi. The policy stipulated that instead of having one core multi-faith syllabus, called Religious and Moral Education, replacing the mono-faith syllabus, called Bible Knowledge, secondary schools should offer the two syllabuses as optional subjects. This meant offering BK and RME side by side in the school curriculum.[53]

Lastly two archival sources provided valuable information on the aims of mission schools in general and RE in particular. They comprised the school reports of The Nyasaland United Educational Institutions (Nyasaland, 1946), which were all Christian, and a report on The Nyasaland Educational Code adopted by the Christian missionaries from 1975 up to 1910 (Nyasaland Educational Board, 1910). The school reports reflected RE as a key subject in the school. This was not surprising given that education was regarded as a means to evengelisation.

5.4.2.2 Secondary Sources

Under secondary sources, a number of documents were reviewed. For example, from the Malawi National Archives, four reports on education were used. Firstly, the Phelps-Stokes Commission Report (Lewis, 1962) was a valuable source of information on the

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[53]See Appendix 9

standards of education in many African countries including Malawi. One of the recommendations of this commission was that the government had to take control of education, which hitherto had been under missionary control, resulting in variations in the quality of education offered. The reason was to have education that produced citizens obedient to the colonial government.

Secondly, another valuable source was the Nyasaland Protectorate Report of the Secondary Education Committee (Nyasaland, 1946). This report had recommendations on the need for the provision of secondary school education in Malawi under the control of the government. Up to 1946, secondary education was offered by the two Christian mission secondary schools: one called Blantyre Secondary School, which had opened in 1940 and the other one called Zomba Catholic Secondary School, which had opened in 1942 (Nyasaland, 1946).

Thirdly, the Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Report of Educational Department for the Year 1952 (Nyasaland, 1952) also provided useful information on the state of education in British colonial Malawi. One of its recommendations was that the bulk of primary education was still in the hands of the Christian faith-communities who also happened to be the sole providers of secondary education by 1952. There was, therefore, need for the government to build more schools.

Fourthly, the American Council on Education for Development in Malawi: Report of the Survey on Education in Malawi (Malawi, 1964) was another rich source of information on the state of education in the newly independent Malawi. One of its recommendations was that since Malawi had just attained independence (in 1964), there was need to review education to reflect and meet the socio-economic needs of an emerging independent nation. It was part of that review that led to the change of the name of the Religious Education syllabus at secondary school level from Religious Knowledge to Bible Knowledge (Banda, 1982).

Furthermore, newspaper articles also provided valuable data on the resistance by the Christian faith-communities to the multi-faith RE curriculum introduced at secondary school level in 2000.[54] The main storyline in the newspaper articles reviewed was that whilst the Christian faith-communities opposed the multi-faith RE curriculum, the Muslim faith-community was in favour of it (Chitosi, 2000a, 2000b; Semu, 2000; Thyoka-Phiri, 2000). Such different views created a controversy between The Ministry of Education as policy-makers and the Christian and Muslim faith-communities as stakeholders in education.

Books, theses, and reviews on education in Malawi (Banda, 1982; Chakanza, 1988, 2000; Chidester et al., 1994; McCracken, 2000; Nankwenya, 1977; Phiri, 1987, 1988; Ross, 1992; Salanjira, 2003; Tengatenga, 1997) also provided valuable information on curriculum changes in RE. The works of Banda (1982), McCracken (2000) and Nankwenya (1977) were more illuminating on the general aims of education offered by the Christian missions. Such aims reflected the ideological positions of the various missions in Malawi.

In addition, BK and RME syllabuses provided information on the aims of RE in Malawi. From such aims the underlying assumptions of Malawi's RE curriculum theory and practice were discerned. Another valuable source comprised Malawi's Education Act and The Bill of Rights. From these documents, I was able to glean some information on the government of Malawi's ideological position on religion as a phenomenon and dimension of social and human life as well as the role of RE in schools. The insights gained helped me to interpret some of the assumptions underpinning the understandings about the dual-mode RE curriculum in Malawi.

One strength of document analysis, as a method of data generation, is that it is "an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 107). However, in my case, one disadvantage was that documents with information relevant to the research topic and question were not

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[54] As discussed in Chapter Two

easy to identify. As a result, it required a lot of time and extensive perusal of documents, some of which did not yield any useful information at all. Furthermore, access to the documents in the first place was problematic in some cases, especially at the Malawi National Archives, where some of the documents catalogued were not physically available on the shelves. Despite these limitations, I managed to get access to the sources described above.

All in all, the documentary evidence generated has been used to construct the genealogy and archaeology (Foucault, 1972) of RE curriculum theory and practice.[55] It has also enabled me to frame the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum within their historical and social-political context.

The next section discusses and justifies the survey questionnaire as a method of data generation for this study.

5.4.3 Survey Questionnaire with Secondary School Head Teachers

A third data production method employed was a survey questionnaire administered to a sample of head teachers of secondary schools offering RE. This method is commonly associated with quantitative research. However, I used it to produce a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data. The intention was to explore the head teachers' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The focus was on the decisions and choices schools were making in implementing the policy change, reasons for such decisions and choices, and also the head teachers' views about the policy change. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: section A had 15 pre-coded questions and section B had one open-ended question.[56]

As an interpretivist study (Henning et al., 2004), prominence was given to qualitative methods and data. The quantitative data were generated to support and corroborate the qualitative data in illuminating how the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was

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[55] As discussed in Chapters Two and Three respectively
[56] See Appendix 5

getting beyond bureaucracy (Darling-Hammond, 1998) at school level. By virtue of their positions, head teachers are leaders in making curriculum decisions and choices at school level. They were, therefore, in a strategic position to complete the questionnaire. The focus of the questionnaire was not on the actual classroom practice, but on how and why the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was understood by the head teachers.

The next section describes and justifies the data analysis employed in this study.

5.5   Data Analysis: Process and Methods

In this section, I discuss and justify the data analysis process and methods employed. Data analysis is described as a transformational process in which raw data is changed into insights about a social phenomenon under study (Wolcott, 1994). In this study, the social phenomenon comprised contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi. As an interpretive study, inductive thematic analysis was employed with the view to reporting the participants' interpretations (understandings) in categories or themes generated from (grounded in) the data.

Thus, on the one hand, thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data generated through interviews, document analysis, and survey questionnaire. On the other hand, statistical analysis, using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) programme, was used to analyse the quantitative data generated with head teachers. A detailed description and discussion of the processes of thematic and statistical analysis conducted for the study are presented in Appendices 7A, 7B and 7C.

The next subsection discusses thematic analysis as used in this study to generate the themes or categories presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

5.5.1 Thematic Analysis

Although thematic analysis is widely used in analysing qualitative data, it is poorly demarcated and acknowledged as a method in its own right (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fact, it is debatable as to whether thematic analysis is a method in its own right or not (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roulston, 2001). Those scholars who do not recognise it as a method in its own right mainly argue that thematic analysis just provides core skills, such as "thematising meanings" (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 347), and the process of thematic coding (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). As such, thematic analysis is useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative data analysis. It is, therefore, the foundation of other qualitative methods that search for themes or patterns, such as conversation analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis (Braun &Clarke, 2006). Thus, it cannot be regarded as a method in its own right, so they argue (Holloway &Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

However, while Ryan and Bernard (2000) and Holloway and Todres (2003) do not regard thematic analysis as a method in its own right, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) argue that thematic analysis "should be considered as a method in its own right". They observe that the only difference between thematic analysis and the other qualitative methods is that these other methods stem from or are tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical position while thematic analysis is not (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite that difference, thematic analysis has a clear theory and procedure of analysing qualitative data. As such, it can and should be considered as a method of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition, Siedel (1998) contends that, qualitative data analysis is much an art as it is a science, since the data generated have to be presented in a way that makes sense and responds to the research question. As such, data analysis is not simply a matter of revealing structures and patterns but is a creative and very personal process, but guided by a rigorous analytical procedure (Siedel, 1998). Thematic analysis is also described as "an inductive, thematic analysis" (Roulston et al., 2003). It is inductive because themes

have to be generated from the data. In this study themes have been generated from the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, using the perspectives of The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, not imposed on the data.

In conducting inductive thematic analysis, I rigorously followed the analytical procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Marshall and Rossman (2006) as summarised in Table 5.5 below. Through this procedure, I managed to code, categorise and thematise the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.[57]

Table 5.5: Procedure of Thematic Data Analysis

Thematic procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)	Thematic procedure proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2006)
1. Familiarising yourself with your data 2. Generating initial codes 3. Searching for themes 4. Reviewing themes 5. Defining and naming themes 6. Producing the report.	1. Organising the data 2. Immersion in the data 3. Coding the data 4. Generating categories and themes 5. Offering interpretations through analytical memos 6. Searching for alternative understandings 7. Writing the thesis

Thus, from Table 5.5, it can be argued that although Braun and Clarke (2006) describe six phases of thematic analysis, the proposed procedure is similar to that by Marshall and Rossman (2006). In fact, if "familiarising yourself with the data" from Braun and Clarke's procedure is taken to include "organising data" and "immersion in the data", in Marshall and Rossman's procedure, the two procedures will correspond phase by phase.

As noted, in the debate surrounding thematic analysis, the phases are generic to all qualitative data analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). So,

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[57] As represented in Chapters Six and Seven

whether thematic analysis is acknowledged as a method in its own right or not, it does not affect the procedure. The point here is that it was along this generic procedure that I conducted thematic analysis of the qualitative data of this study.[58]

These phases should, however, not be taken to imply a linear process of data analysis. Like any other qualitative data analysis method, thematic analysis is iterative. Here, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) aptly summarise the iterative nature of thematic analysis by pointing out that it:

> involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. Writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end, as it does with statistical analyses.

The next subsection presents a discussion of quantitative data analysis applied to the data generated with head teachers.

5.5.2   Statistical Data Analysis

This section describes how the quantitative data was analysed. The data was generated through a questionnaire administered to 54 head teachers of secondary schools offering RE in Malawi. This data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) programme. The intention was to come up with descriptive statistics of head teachers' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. A descriptive statistic is used to describe a set of cases upon which observations about the phenomenon under study are made (Durrheim, 2006; Sarantakos, 2005). In the case of this study, the phenomenon is the head teachers' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The observations were made in keeping with four research questions. The first question investigated the decisions schools were making in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The second question explored the possible reasons for the decisions schools were making while the third investigated how the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was understood by the secondary

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[58] See Appendix 7A

school head teachers. The last question was on the contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change using the perspectives of the head teachers. To cover these questions, 15 pre-coded questions were formulated, as part A of the questionnaire while part B had one question for a thick description of the head teachers' views.[59]

Whilst bearing in mind that correlation or association between variables does not imply causation (Terre-Blanche et al., 2006), the descriptive statistics enabled me to shade light on the head teachers' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. As an interpretive study, the intention was not to make generalisations but to complement the qualitative findings, using correlations between the head teachers' type of school and understandings about the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Just as there is a procedure for thematic data analysis, there is also a procedure for statistical data analysis. It involves quantifying and summarising numerical data (Durrheim, 2006; Sarantakos, 2005). The analytic process involved two stages: preparing data and describing variables. A summary of the quantitative data is presented in appendix 7C.[60]

Although 54 (76%) of the questionnaires were received back from the 71 head teachers, there was one missing case, which reduced the number of valid cases to 53 (75%). In many instances, it was not all the 53 head teachers who responded to each of the questions. The actual figure, therefore, fluctuated from 53 (75%), to 52 (73%) and 51 (72%) head teachers who responded

By using the SPSS program, cross-tabulations[61] were generated, indicating associations between the head teacher's type of school and understanding regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Head teachers from the four categories (types) of schools were used: government, grant-aided, community-day, and private secondary schools. Some of the descriptive statistics have been integrated in some of the themes presented in Chapters Six and Seven. The integration enabled me to fill gaps in, expand, or

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[59] See Appendix 5
[60] The summary is based on the 15 pre-coded questions administered to the head teachers.
[61] See Appendix 8 for the cross-tabulations

corroborate, the qualitative findings. It is an instance of interpreting quantitative data qualitatively.

The next section discusses how the research instruments were piloted.

5.5   Piloting the Study

This section discusses how the study was piloted and the benefits gained. The pilot was conducted in Zomba District in Malawi. The first goal was to check the adequacy of the research instruments in generating information that would help to answer the key research question. Another goal was to have a slight picture of the potential problems that could arise in the process of fieldwork and data-production.

Several benefits can accrue from a pilot study. For instance, commenting on the importance of a pilot study, Sampson (2004, p. 383) points out that although pilot studies:

> …can be used to refine research instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules they have greater use… in foreshadowing research problems and questions, in highlighting gaps and wastage in data collection, and in considering broader and highly significant issues such as research validity, ethics, representation, and researcher health and safety.

A semi-structured interview schedule, used with The Ministry of Education officials, was piloted on two officials at one Education Division office.[62] The aim here was to refine the instrument so that it could elicit the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Two questions were collapsed following the pilot study because the participants did not understand them. One question was: What do you consider to be the key moments in the emergence of the dual-mode RE curriculum? And the other one was: What does The Ministry of Education think are the grounds on which the dual-mode RE could be challenged or contested? The following question was modified: What does The Ministry of Education think should be done to reconcile the

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[62] See Appendix 4

different views about RE? Then, the question became: What does The Ministry of Education think should be the way forward for RE in Malawi?

Besides dropping and changing some of the questions, some refinements were done to the questions. For example, instead of beginning with "In your view" one question changed to "According to The Ministry of Education" – how is the dual-mode RE curriculum perceived by people in Malawi?

Furthermore, a second interview schedule, used with faith-community leaders, was piloted on two faith-community leaders, one a Christian and the other a Muslim. Changes and modifications were made similar to those made to the interview schedule used with The Ministry of Education officials.[63]

The survey questionnaire was piloted on five head teachers of secondary schools offering RE who were currently studying with the University of Malawi at Chancellor College. Apparently, the questions were clear to the head teachers. However, one insight was that some head teachers were not comfortable with indicating their names and those of their schools on the questionnaire, despite assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity when reporting the research findings.

In addition to refining the research instruments, the pilot study helped me to understand myself as a researcher. For instance, it enabled me to learn how to negotiate the use of a tape-recorder with the research participants in an interview. I also learnt that research participants tend to resist tape-recorded interviews as well as mistrust the researcher's agenda. Another lesson was that getting people to participate in research requires negotiating skills such as reassuring participants of the confidentiality of the data and explaining the agenda of the study. Thus, from the pilot study, useful insights were gained on conducting research.

The next section discusses the methodological limitations of the study.

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[63] See Appendix 6

5.7   Methodological Limitations

Since every study design has its own limitations, this is an important point to consider the methodological limitations of this study. There are always trade-offs to make in designing a study, due to limited resources, time, and human ability "to grasp the complex nature of the social reality" (Patton, 2002, p. 223).

The first limitation was practical in nature, relating to scope of the study. This phenomenological study was only limited to exploring the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. To this end, it only used perspectives of three categories of research participants namely, Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities. In a sense, it was an elite curriculum policy study, researching upwards by focusing on policy understandings by participants in positions of leadership. As such, the sample has limitations in terms of what counts as voice and therefore data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009). Thus, given the scope of the study, the sample left out voices of other stakeholders in education, such as those of RE teachers, learners, and parents. These voices could have added another dimension to the study and are, therefore, possible areas for further inquiry.

Secondly, by employing a phenomenological methodology, the study was limited to an interpretive paradigm where particularisation, not generalisation, of research findings is the concern. Qualitative data allows for naturalistic generalisations, extrapolations, and transferability of research findings (Patton, 2002), or "fuzzy generalisations" (Swann & Pratt, 2003, p. 201), or context-bound generalisations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). On the other hand, quantitative data allows for universal or context-free generalisations (Sarantakos, 2005). Thus, if anything, the findings of this study can only allow context-bound, not context-free, generalisations because of the dominance of the qualitative data. However, some quantitative data was inserted in developing the storyline about the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. Universal generalisability of

the research findings was not the concern of this study, but their credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A third limitation was gaining access to the research participants. Since my research participants were elites, they had usually busy schedules and were operating under time-demanding situations. For example, after obtaining informed consent from two Ministry of Education officials and one of the faith-community leaders, it was difficult to get them for the actual interview. I had to visit their offices for more three occasions before meeting them to arrange for an interview. There were also instances where the elite interviewees kept on changing the agreed time for the interviews. I had to agree to the changes though at a cost in terms of time, money, and travel effort.

Another difficulty faced during the interviews was the tendency by some interviewees to divert from the interview questions. While the semi-structured interview schedules (see Appendices 4 and 6) enabled me to avoid asking questions that would evoke long narratives, some research participants still gave long and sometimes off-the-point narratives. In such cases, an exercise of good listening skills and skillful personal interaction, question-framing, and gentle probing for elaboration and redirection, became crucial. In the process, I was able to generate valuable data on contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Furthermore, interviewing elites also required the ability to establish my competence and credibility with the research participants on the topic of study. This required showing my knowledge and understanding of the topic and projecting an accurate conceptualisation of the research problem through thoughtful questioning. That effort was rewarded with data of good quality as the elite interviewees contributed insights and meanings to the interview from their perspectives.

There were also instances where participants showed vague understanding of some issues covered in the interview. For example, one interviewee had to ask for a clarification and an example, when asked to comment on the view by some people that the dual-mode RE

curriculum was there to meet the political rather than educational needs of Malawi. Elaboration and exemplification of the issues covered in the interview helped to clear the vague spaces in the participants' understandings. Some of the interviewees even commented that the interview was an eye-opener on the issue of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. For instance, one Ministry of Education official (MOE-3) had this to say:

Well, I want to thank you so much for interviewing us – and again for this subject that we talked about. I think it's an eye-opener to us on how this subject should be handled. So your coming alone at least has given us food for thought for a particular subject (Interview, MOE-3).

The next section discusses the ethical issues considered in this study.

5.8   Ethical Considerations

There is a variety of scholarly opinion on ethical issues in social research. For instance, Sarantakos (2005, p. 16) observes that in social research, efforts on ethics aim at making research more systematic and accountable by introducing "laws which regulate the access to information as well as the behaviour of investigators." The ethics also "ensure that inquiry is conducted according to professional and ethical standards" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 16). For Wassenaar (2006, p. 61), the "essential purpose of research ethics is to protect the welfare of the research participants." On the other hand, Adler and Lerman (2003), in their theory of relational ethics, point out that, the researcher must actively care about and care for the researched and their rights, to ensure that the research participants are not adversely affected in any way by the research or publication of its findings.

Thus, one central aspect of research ethics is to protect the research participants from any harm. Sarantakos (2005) identifies three types of harm that can be experienced by the research participants, namely, physical, mental, and legal. It is also acknowledged that research ethics go beyond "the welfare of the research participants and extends into areas such as scientific misconduct and plagiarism" (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 61).

Although the views on research ethics are varied, there are four widely accepted ethical principles namely, nonmaleficence, autonomy and respect for dignity of research participants, beneficence, and justice (Wassenaar, 2006). The point here is that, in conducting this research, effort was made to comply with these principles where applicable.

First, the principle of nonmaleficence states that the researchers should "ensure that no harm befalls the research participants as a direct or indirect consequence of the research" (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 67). In keeping with this principle, the study did not involve any physical harm (Sarantakos, 2005) on the part of the research participants. There was no instrument or procedure that could injure the participants. Furthermore, the study did not directly or indirectly subject the research participants to any mental harm. There was no procedure that would cause the participants "discomfort, stress of some kind, anxiety, or loss of self-esteem or embarrassment" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 19).

For instance, although the research was in the area of RE, I did not ask the research participants questions that would upset their private spaces of spirituality. In addition, personal questions relating to the research participants or significant others were avoided. The questions were not formulated in a demeaning manner and research participants were treated with respect. Thus, there was no treatment that might have motivated the participants to harm themselves during or after the study (Sarantakos, 2005).

Furthermore, even with regard to the faith-community leaders, the study did not infringe on their private spaces of spirituality. It probed into the influence of public theology on public policy.[64] As such, asking for the faith-communities' understandings was not of huge ethical concern, given that the faith-communities are embedded in the public sphere. Furthermore, the faith-communities do influence or contest what should be taught as RE in schools.

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[64] This is discussed in Chapter Four and theorised in Chapter Eight.

In addition, the interview schedules used were both in English and the official local language – Chichewa. This was to give the participants freedom to express themselves in the language they were comfortable with. The same was true with the questionnaire.[65] However, all research participants preferred English to the local language. In fact, one research participant felt offended at the suggestion that the interview could be conducted in the local language as evident in following remark:

But I have been speaking to you in English all this long since you entered this office. Now you think I will not be able to answer the interview questions in English (Field Notes, FC-1).

Secondly, in keeping with the principle of autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, the research avoided any legal harm which can occur when the researcher violates any rights of the research participants, "such as their right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality" (Sarantakos, 2005, p.19). In observing these ethical requirements, I avoided deception or misrepresentation in my dealings with the research participants. In general, permission and informed consent were obtained from The Ministry of Education, the faith-communities, and the actual individual research participants.[66] In addition, I explained to them the purpose of the research and the importance of their participation. They were also informed of their freedom to choose whether to participate in the research or not, answer all or omit some of the questions they were not comfortable with, or withdraw from the research any time they so wished, without fearing any negative effects on them personally or their organisations.

Thirdly, in keeping with the principle of justice which "in general requires that people receive what is due to them" (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 68), the study has safeguarded the research participants' confidentiality, anonymity and interests (Denscombe, 2002), by avoiding disclosing their identities. Anonymity has been achieved through use of code names when referring to or quoting the research participants. The following codes have

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[65] See Appendices 4, 5 and 6
[66] See Appendices 1 and 3

been used: MOE for Ministry of Education official, HT for head teacher, and FC for faith-community leader.

To safeguard the interests of the research participants, I was mindful of the fact that getting people to participate in research is both intrusive and obtrusive, involving personal interaction and requiring cooperation between the researcher and the research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). For example, in one case, The Executive Director of one faith-community had agreed to do the interview in the morning.   On the day of the interview, The Director had an urgent meeting to attend at the same time of the interview. This necessitated rescheduling the interview to the afternoon of the same day. But when time came for the interview in the afternoon, The Director was not yet back from the meeting. After about an hour of waiting, The Director arrived, called and told the Research and Education Officer to do the interview on behalf on the faith-community, as the director was going to attend yet another urgent meeting. Thus, I finally conducted the interview with the Research and Education Officer who turned out to be well informed on matters of education in general and RE in particular.

The example above demonstrates how obtrusive and intrusive research can be in general, since it interferes with the official and personal operations of the participants. Thus, I was ethically bound to respect the participants by behaving in a way that did not upset their private and public spaces. In general, I avoided behaving in a way that would have adversely affected the participants as a consequence of engaging in the research. Commenting on the need for sensitivity to the adverse effects research can have on the research participants, Denscombe (2002, p. 179) observes that:

> Social researchers need to be sensitive to the likely impact of their work on those involved. Whether research is done on people or whether it is done with them, there is the possibility that their lives could be affected in some way through the fact of having participated. There is a duty on researchers, therefore, to work in a way that minimizes the prospect of their research having an adverse effect on those who are involved.

The fourth ethical consideration related to what Wassenaar (2006, p. 61) describes as "scientific misconduct and plagiarism". One way in which these ethical issues were avoided in writing the thesis was by disclosing my research motivation, research design, methodology, methods and their logic. In addition, I acknowledged all the information used in this study directly or indirectly.

Finally, the principle of beneficence (Wassenaar, 2006) states that research should benefit in some way the research participants or the society. This study may not directly benefit the research participants but Malawi's education system in general. The study has implications for negotiation of curriculum policy with stakeholders. It, therefore, makes a contribution to the understanding of education policy and RE curriculum theory and practice appropriate for a democratic and religiously diverse society. It, therefore, has a benefit for the society.

5.9   Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed and justified the research design, focussing on methodology and methods employed to produce and analyse data. The first part has discussed the data-production process with a focus on phenomenology; participants and sampling procedure; and research methods namely, in-depth interviews, survey questionnaire, and document analysis. The second part has discussed the data analysis process, focussing on thematic analysis of the qualitative data and statistical analysis of the quantitative data. The last part of chapter has dealt with piloting of the study, methodological limitations, and ethical considerations of the study.

In Part Three of the study and Chapter Six, I begin presenting the findings of the first-level analysis of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The presentation is done within the overarching theoretical framework of politics of the school curriculum.

Part Three: First-Level Analysis and Interpretation

The key to doing a good interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data, to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding[67].

Part-Three presents a phenomenological analysis and interpretation (Patton, 2002) of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. The essence of the contesting spaces is presented using the perspectives of The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities. As van Manen (1990) and Patton (2002) state, phenomenological research asks for the essence of a phenomenon for the research participants.

In analysing the findings, I was guided by the rule of thumb that the "key to doing a good interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data, to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding" (Terre-Blanche et al., 2006, p. 321). To this end, I presented themes reflecting the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, supported with data extracts. The data extracts were used "to portray the participants' perspectives" and "develop an "insiders' point of view" (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 265). They were drawn from the interview data generated with The Ministry of Education officials and faith-community leaders as well as the questionnaire data generated through a survey questionnaire with secondary school head teachers. Some data extracts were from analysis of documents such as minutes on RE curriculum consultation meetings and newspaper articles commenting on the reaction to the multi-faith RE introduced in 2000.

In addition, some statistics of head teachers' understandings about how and why schools were implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change were inserted in the interpretive analysis. I avoided rushing into the "abstract and de-contextualised forms of analysis" (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995, p. 52), by first presenting a thick and thematic description of the understandings within Malawi's historical and socio-political context.

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[67] Terre-Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006, p. 321

Through this approach, I addressed the issue of credibility of the study by presenting what the research participants understood about the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum and the processes that influenced their thoughts (Lodico, et al., 2006).

My approach was to distinguish certain themes according to a dominant pattern in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The particular themes outlined and discussed are not hard-and-fast categories. The contesting spaces under each theme reflect very different understandings on certain issues. The categorisation of the themes into positive and negative understandings (or understandings portraying the opportunities or weaknesses of the dual-mode RE curriculum for Malawi) was an attempt to make sense of a diverse, complex, and nuanced pattern of the perspectives by the research participants, without undue simplification. A number of ideas and arguments within the two main categorisations overlap not only with other ideas and arguments but also with other themes.

Thus, as a phenomenological analysis (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990), the study foregrounded the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for Malawi. The essence is the emphasis on the value of the policy change, either as an asset or a liability, for Malawi. Thus, in this first-level analysis and interpretation, prominence is given to themes grounded in the data, within the overarching theoretical framework of politics of the school curriculum.

Central to Chapter Six is the theorisation of the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an asset. This has been represented as 'Politics of the School Curriculum One'. On the other hand, Chapter Seven theorises the essence of the contesting spaces as a liability, represented as 'Politics of the School Curriculum Two'.

For mainly academic and not sentimental reasons, I employed a seemingly 'staccato' style in presenting the findings from the three research participants' categories. The aim was to allow the voice of each category to be heard separately. Such a style also enabled me to respond to the key research question in a fairly balanced manner. However, this

does not mean that there was homogeneity of perspective for each category. Instead, heterogeneity was the feature of various voices in each category of the research participants, illuminating contesting spaces in understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

More specifically, the subsequent discussion responds to the study's key research question which sought to explore the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. The exploration was based on the perspectives of Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities?

For a deep exploration of the key research question, the analysis, specifically, presents five key interwoven storylines. The first storyline relates to how the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood. The second illuminates the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Furthermore, the third storyline explores the reasons for the contesting spaces while the fourth examines the ideological assumptions underpinning the contesting spaces. The last storyline illuminates politics of the school curriculum as reflected in the contesting spaces in curriculum policy change.

Furthermore, I have extensively drawn on literature in theorising the contesting spaces as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum. To make a sound academic argument, the subsequent discussion, in Chapters Six and Seven, has been organised to represent the research findings where the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is respectively contested as an asset and a liability for Malawi. In that contestation, the perceived value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is represented according to the voices of The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders.

To safeguard the anonymity of the research participants, I used code names. For the officials representing the nine Ministry of Education offices, abbreviated as MOEs, I used codes ranging from MOE-1 to MOE-9. For the 54 secondary school head teachers,

abbreviated as HTs, I used codes ranging from HT-1 to HT-54. And for the leaders of the six nationally organised faith-communities, abbreviated as FCs, I used codes ranging from FC-1 to FC-6.

It should be noted that although the faith of The Ministry of Education officials and secondary school teachers could influence their understandings about the dual-mode RE curriculum, this study has not explored the role of personal religious persuasions. It is, however, possible that what they expressed as views in their official capacity was, somehow, a reflection of their personal religious convictions. The study did not specifically seek for such personal convictions and an exploration of such convictions can constitute an area for further study.

Chapter Six

Politics of the School Curriculum One: Opportunities of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum for Malawi

6.1   Introduction

An overarching theoretical understanding of politics of the school curriculum with its multiple aspects frames the analysis and interpretation of the research findings in this and subsequent chapters. Using this analytical lens, the different understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change have been theorised as contesting spaces in curriculum policy change. The claim is that the understandings reflected differences and disagreements about the perceived value of the curriculum policy change. Thus, at an ideological level, the research participants perceived the value of the curriculum differently. It is such different perceptions that have been theorised here as politics of the school curriculum.

As a phenomenological study, a thematic approach was used with a view to giving a thick description of the research findings. To do that, emphasis was upon theorising the various contesting spaces in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, in categories or themes. The point here is that a thematic approach provided an empathic description and interpretation of the understandings, with multiple perspectives in one place. Such an approach has the potential to enable comparison, contrast, analysis and insight on the phenomenon under study (Stengel & Tom, 2006).

The term opportunity is used here to describe the curriculum's perceived potential to benefit Malawi; its perceived value or strength in the context of Malawi's needs. The analysis also interrogated the value attributed to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as expressed in the understandings by the research participants. The study argues that the essence of the understandings reflected different meanings that the curriculum

policy had for the research participants. Such differences are theorised in this study as dynamics of politics of the school curriculum. The interrogation also involved problematising the various meanings of curriculum policy change. As observed by Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004, p. 3):

> The meanings of policy texts…do not reside unproblematically in the text itself as something to be 'discovered' or rendered 'visible', but in the relationship between the text and the social structure. The meaning and significance of policy at any particular historical juncture is something that must be rendered intelligible through a process of interrogation, by ascertaining the way that discursive contexts inherent within the social and historical processes manifest themselves in and through textual production, formulation and articulation.

Thus, the study interrogated the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change to render their meanings intelligible. An understanding of such meanings could have implications for negotiation of education policy, in general, and RE curriculum theory and practice, in particular.

Furthermore, while problematising the perceived value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in terms of opportunities for Malawi, the claim is that the understandings tended to attribute value to the curriculum policy change without interrogating its ontological, epistemological and methodological contradictions and supposedly 'real' value. These contradictions create ambiguity about what the dual-mode RE curriculum seeks to achieve in educational terms, rendering its educational justification problematic.

Largely, the overarching contention of this chapter as well as the subsequent chapters is that the different understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum reflected contesting spaces in curriculum policy change. Such contesting spaces represented disagreements about the value of the policy change. As such, they can be described and theorised as dynamics or aspects of politics of the school curriculum.

Generally, theorists conceptualise politics of the school curriculum as attempts by various social actors to contest or influence the conduct of education in the school (Apple, 2004; Chisholm, 2005; Cornbleth, 1990; Glatthorn et al., 2006; Lawton, 1980; McNeil, 2006;

Thomas, 1983). This conception has been extended in this study to include the various understandings that people may have about the value of a curriculum.

The next section analyses the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in terms of its perceived opportunities for Malawi.

6.2   The Perceived Value of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change

This section specifically analyses and theorises the contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as offering various opportunities for Malawi. Different themes have been presented, reflecting different forms of value which the policy change had for the three elite categories of the research participants, namely, The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. Although the curriculum policy change was understood as having some educational value, variations were there in the way the value was perceived.

In particular, The Ministry of Education officials tended to justify the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change while referring to the difficulty faced in getting the policy beyond bureaucracy into practice. The secondary school head teachers, on the other hand, emphasised the educational value of the policy change while alluding to factors affecting curriculum implementation at school level. For the faith-community leaders, emphasis was placed on the value of the policy change, reflecting their need for curriculum space in public schools where knowledge about their respective religions could be promoted. Thus, ideologically, the contesting spaces in the understandings reflected the voices of the participants about the perceived value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, as analysed and interpreted by the researcher.

The next section discusses the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum using the perspectives of The Ministry of Education officials. It analyses what the

officials perceived as the opportunities of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for Malawi.

6.2.1   The Voice of Ministry of Education Officials[68]

Under this sub-section, three themes are discussed as representing the voice of the Ministry of Education officials regarding the perceived opportunities of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for Malawi. The first theme portrays the policy change as good for democracy, religious diversity, and civil toleration of differences; the second as a politically correct compromise; and the third as meeting Malawi's academic needs.

6.2.1.1   Curriculum Policy Change Good for Democracy, Religious Diversity and Civil Tolerance of Differences

Under this theme, some of the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as being in line with the ethos of democracy in a religiously diverse society. The policy change was understood as an opportunity for meeting the democratic aspirations of Malawi where people of different faith identities need to feel accommodated within the educational system. To this effect, the policy change was promoting civil toleration of differences as well as social cohesion. Thus, the policy change was viewed as fair to the different faith-communities in Malawi.

Commenting on the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in accommodating people of different faith identities, one Ministry of Education official (MOE 4) stated that

One of the reasons why there was that shift from… Bible Knowledge to Religious and Moral Education was to accommodate - you know initially there was Bible Knowledge and people were learning Islam- that is in History. Now since these - both of these are concerned with religion, that's why there was that move to combine the two; to capture issues concerning Islam, to capture issues concerning BK, and issues concerning what we refer to as traditional type of religion (Interview, MOE-4).

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[68] The reader is reminded that, to enhance the confidentiality of the research participants, the designations of The Ministry of Education officials have abbreviated as MOE-1, MOE-2, etc., in the representation of the research findings.

In this understanding, reference was made to the attempt by Malawi's government to accommodate three faith-traditions, namely, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions. This understanding was an attempt to portray the educational value of the policy change in relation to promoting unity in diversity.

Another understanding portrayed the curriculum policy change as an opportunity for promoting equity among people of different religions in Malawi. This was expressed as a justification for RME. MOE-6 responded:

…basically the introduction of Religious and Moral Studies was aimed at… respecting or treating the religions in Malawi equally. Because at first we had Bible Knowledge which was mainly focusing on Christianity; but then with the introduction of Religious and Moral Studies, it was like also taking on board the other religions like Islam, Buddhism and the like [sic] (interview, MOE-6).

The above official used the title Religious and Moral Studies instead of the official title of Religious and Moral Education and even mentioned Buddhism which is not part of RME syllabus. This could be a reflection of his personal understanding of a multi-faith syllabus in general.

Furthermore, the value of the policy change was also understood as an opportunity for Malawi to promote democracy, pluralism, social cohesion and co-existence. MOE-5 observed that:

The Ministry of Education introduced this system that we are calling dual-mode… Religious Education in our schools after facing a lot of resistance from mainly the Christian community… because most of the proprietors of our schools are Christian in nature. After assessing the material in Religious and Moral Education, they felt that a little fraction of the material that was being offered was really covering the Christian doctrines. But they felt that most of the material now was coming in from other religious doctrines. So, they felt the aim of establishing their schools was now being jeopardized. And they really threatened a lot if the Ministry was to go forward offering Religious and Moral Education. So, there were really numerous consultations… in a way of balancing up… issues, because there was little that we were covering from other religious bodies. Now with the democratic dispensation, this other quarter again was supposed to be taken on board.

MOE-5 also perceived the policy change as an opportunity for Malawi to have compromise among the faith-communities. Through it, a compromise was reached when

the government felt that it would keep the previous syllabus - BK - and the new syllabus - RME - as parallel courses and give the learners the option to choose.

Those that are interested to know about other religious… doctrines are free to do so. Because we are now living in a community where we need to co-exist; part of co-existence where now we need to live as …a global community. So knowledge of what our friends believe in was felt to be also of necessity. So that's why the Ministry thought it wise that without phasing out Bible Knowledge we should go forward again…offering Bible Knowledge but also at the same time offer Religious and Moral Education as separate subjects altogether. …So those that would want to learn Bible Knowledge only should choose Bible Knowledge. Those that want to learn Religious and Moral Education and have further knowledge they should choose Religious and Moral Education (Interview, MOE-5).

In the above understanding, the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was perceived within Malawi's historical and socio-political context.[69] Thus, while the government had initially wanted, in the year 2000, to replace BK as a mono-faith syllabus with RME as a multi-faith syllabus, contestation to that initiative by the Christian faith-communities forced the government to engage in curriculum policy negotiations with the faith-communities. The introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy in the year 2001 followed such negotiations. Thus, the policy change was perceived as a *modus vivendi*; a curriculum arrangement accommodating the different demands for RE by both Christian and Muslim faith-communities. It was a curriculum policy compromise. However, the existence of BK as a mono-faith space and RME as a multi-faith space was not problematised as contradictory. Instead, the policy change was hailed as democratic and fair in the context of Malawi's religious diversity.

For instance, MOE-1 described the policy change as an initiative aimed at accommodating the changes in society as well as the competing demands by people from diverse religious backgrounds, as evident in the following extract:

Well this [policy change] came in as a result of the curriculum developers who thought that with the changes in society - you know the society being dynamic - they thought we have to consider a wider spectrum of the curriculum such that - you know - as far as religion is concerned, we have people from different types of religions - different faiths. So to cater for everyone at once, then they thought of coming up with this RME to cater for this other sector or members of the different faiths. They saw that by simply

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[69] As discussed in Chapter Two

following… Bible Knowledge which had been there for quite a long time, it was like members of other faiths were not being considered. So, it was out of that kind of thinking, say the society is changing and more people are belonging to different faiths. So to try to cater for the members of different faiths, then RME was coming in as a solution to that (Interview, MOE-1).

Although the current RME syllabus is based on three religions only, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions, the above Ministry of Education official (MOE-1) perceived the multi-faith approach as its positive value. The RME syllabus justifies the coverage of these three religions on the premise that they are the major religious traditions in Malawi (Ministry of Education, 1998). Thus, the policy change represented the opening up of the RE curriculum space to other religions apart from Christianity.

Another understanding was expressed by MOE-3 who understood the policy change as an opportunity for Malawi to promote democracy and religious diversity, as reflected in the following data extract:

Initially the aim - you know - was to have an all encompassing syllabus. ...So Religious and Moral Education was meant to replace Bible Knowledge so that it is all encompassing in terms of religion – the various religious societies which we have in this country. That was the initial aim, of course, in line with the current democratic dispensation. As you are aware that having met resistance...from mainly faith-communities, the Ministry had no choice but to still bring out Bible Knowledge to run concurrently with Religious and Moral Education as optional subjects (Interview, MOE-3).

This understanding was corroborated by MOE-5 as follows:

We must appreciate that the world is changing and our education system must reflect the changes in society. What is happening in our education system is an answer or reflection of what is happening in society. We must…really appreciate that in the past there was general laxity on the part of the Muslim community to go to schools – the same belief that when you go there, they will teach you Christianity. Now whilst we are trying to promote access to education, which is a right of each and every…citizen of Malawi, the other area that was thought…would help the… Muslim community to get access to education is the teaching of Religious and Moral Education …And as we are talking now really the areas that are dominated by the Muslim community they are registering progress in terms of enrolment just because of this introduction (Interview, MOE-5).

Here the value of the policy change was perceived as an opportunity for Malawi to promote access to education among the Muslim faith-community members. The claim

was that because RME as a multi-faith syllabus covers Islam alongside Christianity and African Traditions, Muslims in Malawi felt free to attend schooling without fearing conversion to Christianity. That sense of freedom led to increased numbers of Muslim learners in schools, promoting the right to education of every child. In other words, mono-faith RE discouraged Muslim children from attending schooling. Consequently, members of the Muslim faith-community lagged behind in education and the opportunities it offers.

In connection with promoting social cohesion and co-existence, MOE-9 observed that:

It was to cater for both the Christians as well as the Muslims. Originally we had Bible Knowledge only…which the Muslims, most of them - some of them – were not comfortable with. So they were resisting …to learn the subject. So the introduction of Religious and Moral Education has catered for the…Islamic aspects which have made them to…have no problems in learning the subject (Interview, MOE-9).

The above views were framed within the context of Malawi's religious diversity and democracy where the policy change was understood as an attempt to accommodate the main religions found in Malawi. The views were informed by a broad historical and socio-political context in which the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was introduced.

Politically, Malawi had been under one-party dictatorship since its independence from the British colonial rule in 1964. There was a political change in 1994 to multiparty democracy which brought in issues of human rights and social justice. Thus, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood as being in line with that political change as well as Malawi's religious diversity. Whilst the BK syllabus had been taught in schools since independence and was meeting the needs of the Christian faith-communities (Chidester et al., 1994), its mono-faith approach did not cater for members of other religions, such as Muslims. On the other hand, the RME syllabus, because of its multi-faith approach, was understood as catering for the needs of non-Christian members.

It was against this background that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was perceived as an opportunity for Malawi. Its introduction served as a means of promoting social justice (equity) among people of different faiths as well as promoting peace and

unity in diversity. This view resonates with Harley and Wedekind s' (2004) observation that governments align national curricula to the political vision of maintaining peace and unity among people.

However, the understandings failed to acknowledge the contradictions embedded in the dual-nature of the curriculum. Two different curriculum spaces are created: the mono-faith and the multi-faith RE space, with contradictory ontology, epistemology and methodology, as discussed in Chapter Three. Thus, whilst the multi-faith syllabus is a discursive space where dialogue across difference can be promoted, the mono-faith syllabus is exclusivist.

It has been demonstrated in Chapter Two that ontologically, the mono-faith space has one religion as the basis of its content while the multi-faith space is based on many religions. It has also been argued that the two spaces create ambiguity in terms of what RE is supposed to achieve at school level. There are educational contradictions with respect to the aims that the dual-mode RE curriculum is trying to achieve in Malawi. One overarching claim of this study is that such contradictions, though unacknowledged in the understandings by the Ministry of Education officials, negate or minimise the educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. This claim finally matures into the thesis of the study in Chapter Nine, where it is postulated that the perceived value of a curriculum may inadvertently mask its educational contradictions.

The next sub-section discusses the policy change as an opportunity for a political compromise.

6.2.1.2 Curriculum Policy Change: A Politically Correct Compromise

Under this theme the understandings by the Ministry of Education officials portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum as an opportunity for a political compromise. This was on the premise that it was a politically correct response to the different demands and pressures for RE. It managed to provide a seemingly win-win situation for the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. Thus, the policy change was understood as a compromise over the controversy that arose between the faith-communities and the Ministry of

Education when the RME syllabus was introduced in 2000 to replace the BK syllabus. It was government's attempt to accommodate the faith-communities' competing demands for RE. To that extent, it was understood as a curricular strategy to meet the different ideologies of the Christian and Muslim faith-communities.

As argued in Chapter One, the above understanding resonates with the view that a curriculum is a hotly contested space (Apple, 2004) as well as a battleground of many competing ideologies and influences (Kelly, 1999). It is also in line with the argument that maintaining peace and unity among people is an escapable duty of any government and that closely aligning curriculum policy to government's political vision is one strategy of promoting harmony among various stakeholders in society (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). The argument here is that, Malawi's government aligned its RE curriculum policy to its political vision of maintaining peace and unity among the faith-communities by adopting the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

With reference to the political justification of the policy change, MOE-7 commented:

Whatever you offer in the society is political and [has] political ideologies which the education system has to advocate. You cannot advocate things which are outside the political world. So the offering of ... [BK and RME] is to answer the political demands which are out there. People now…know we are in a democratic dispensation. Nobody can just force something on you (Interview, MOE-7).

Another perceived political value was reflected in the view that the RME syllabus was introduced under political pressure, expressed by MOE-8 as follows:

Now I should say the Ministry was not ready to introduce [RME]. But due to political muscles or pressures, the Ministry then had to succumb to political pressure… It's true that from the onset, the idea was to introduce or to come away from the Christian values which [were] predominant in the country and still [are] to possibly Islamic …belief (Interview, MOE-8).

The above view interpreted the policy change as a political move aimed at replacing the Christian values with the Islamic values. However, one can argue that it is hard to imagine how RME can replace the Christian values since, as a multi-faith space, Christianity is accommodated alongside Islam and African Traditional Religions. If anything, the claim could be that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was an

attempt to end Christianity's domination of the RE curriculum space. Given the history of education in Malawi, RE had been based on the Christian faith ever since formal schooling was introduced by the Christian missionaries from the 1870s. That situation went on up until the late 1980s when Malawi started adopting multi-faith RE (See Chapter Two).

Agreeing with the observation that some people viewed the policy change as political rather educational, MOE-3 observed that:

There could be some bit of truth in that because of the timing of the introduction of the change. It's unfortunate that the change took place when the country had an Islamic president – a Muslim president. ... So, there were all those suspicions, even before the change was introduced, to say it looks like the general drive – political drive of this regime was to kind of like Islamise the country. And ...one of the avenues they would use is the education system. ... So already before even the change was fully introduced, there was already that suspicion. So when it came out I think it just kind of confirmed the suspicions to say okay here we are now. So, no matter how rational the introduction of the new change... was, it didn't really make sense (Interview, MOE-3).

The above understanding was informed by the socio-political context in which the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced. The policy was introduced at the time Malawi was led by a Muslim head of state. Within that context, the multi-faith syllabus was perceived as an attempt by the President to have his religion included in the school curriculum. Such a change was understood as going against the history of RE in Malawi, which had been based on Christianity only. In a sense, the policy change was perceived as an attempt to end hegemony in RE where the Christian faith was taught at the exclusion of other faiths.

Justifying the introduction of RME, as a multi-faith syllabus, the then director of higher education in the Ministry of Education, Mr. Charles Gunsaru, was quoted by the *Nation Newspaper* (Semu, 1 February, 2000, p. 3) as saying:

> Religious and Moral Studies is more wider [sic] than Bible Knowledge since the old subject only covered the Bible, now the thinking is that society is entitled to learn and know all the religions that are there in the country and not Christianity only. …All we are trying to teach the pupils is that there is a supreme being and not to put any dividing lines.

However, one criticism here would be that the RME syllabus does not include all the religions found in Malawi but only the three main religious traditions of Malawi. Of course, it would not be possible to study all the religions of the world. As such, selecting which religions to study has to be based on some criteria. The criterion used in the case of RME was that the religions to had to be the main religious traditions, in terms of strong presence in Malawi.

The spokesperson of The Ministry of Education was quoted as saying that the move to introduce the RME syllabus was an ongoing process that had started in primary schools sometime back and was elevated to secondary schools (Semu, 2000, p. 3). However, the justification by The Ministry of Education reflects an attempt to respond to people's competing ideologies and demands for RE.

Although attempts were made by The Ministry of Education to clarify the rationale of the policy change on educational grounds, some understandings portrayed the political nature of the curriculum. In addition, the fact that the policy change came in as a compromise between mono-faith and multi-faith RE strengthens the claim that it was, in a sense, political.

Apparently, the concern by government was to create a win-win situation between the Christian and Muslim faith-communities, on the one hand, and the government itself, on the other hand. Furthermore, the different understandings reflected disagreements about the value of the policy change. Such disagreements are theorised in this study as a contesting spaces in curriculum policy change. They reflect politics of the school curriculum in which the value of the policy change is perceived differently by different social actors.

The next sub-section discusses the policy change as an opportunity for meeting Malawi's academic needs.

6.2.1.3   Curriculum Policy Change Meeting Malawi's Academic Needs

Under this theme, some of The Ministry of Education officials understood the dual-mode RE curriculum as an opportunity on the premise that it was meeting Malawi's academic

needs. The policy's value was perceived with respect to the academic goal of broadening the learners' cognitive horizons. To that effect, the dual-mode RE curriculum was understood to have the potential to help learners understand religion as an important dimension of human and social life. One common understanding was that RE should be an educational activity aimed at helping learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion.

Some of the understandings justified the policy change purely on educational grounds without giving room for any political justification. The political value of the policy change in providing a seemingly win-win situation between the Christian and Muslim faith communities was played down by some Ministry of Education officials. For instance, MOE-4 stated

I think as a Ministry I don't think I could actually support that argument. As I indicated already that…Religious and Moral Education was capturing …Christianity, Islam, as well as what could be referred to as traditional religion. You know even before the introduction of this Christianity, still people here in Malawi were worshipping God through their myths. And this syllabus was capturing this aspect as well. So I don't think as Ministry we could introduce a syllabus to please some quarters of the society. For sure no; it was on academic purposes (Interview, MOE-4).

Another understanding that the policy was not introduced on political but educational grounds was expressed by MOE-2 as follows:

I don't think so because I am looking at …first as we said they only taught Bible Knowledge. But this new other subject now it's more encompassing. So the pupils are taught more religions. Apart from Christianity, they are also taught about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, all these other religions which are also important for the pupils to know. So I cannot necessarily say it's there for political aims. I still feel it's good for pupils to also know that somewhere they also have these religions even those religions which are not in Malawi. It is true that they will learn about Hinduism, Buddhism plus other religions which are very popular in other countries but not popular here in Malawi (Interview, MOE-2).

Although the above official also mentioned Hinduism and Buddhism as some of the religions to be taught in multi-faith syllabus, the RME syllabus only covered Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions. However, reflected in the view of the above two officials is an acknowledgement that the policy change was not meant to please some quarters of the society. Instead, the policy managed to provide a win-win situation by

accommodating different and competing demands for RE by the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. To that extent, the policy was political although such a view has been downplayed in some of the voices of the research participants. This observation also matures into the thesis of the study that the apparent value of a curriculum may inadvertently mask its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value.[70]

A further justification of the RME syllabus purely on academic grounds was expressed by MOE-3:

...rationally speaking, the introduction of Religious and Moral Education was meant to kind of bridge the gap which was there in our [education] system as many pupils move from secondary to say university. Because when they go to [the] university, what they study is broader than Bible Knowledge. ...So it was kind of preparing them to...be able to pursue such studies at a tertiary level. ... If we can find a way also of arraying all those fears to say that this is purely academic, to prepare pupils for further academic pursuits at a tertiary and higher level rather than religious that would be better (interview, MOE-3).

This academic justification resonates with the rationale for introducing RME as a multi-faith syllabus for a democratic and pluralistic society (Ministry of Education, 1998), as discussed in Chapter Two. One insight here could be that although the Ministry of Education officials seemed to justify the inclusion of multi-faith RE on academic grounds, they did not problematise the educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum. Mono-faith and multi-faith RE promote oppositional aims of education given their oppositional ontology, epistemology and methodology. The Ministry of Education officials did not seem to recognise the ambiguity that the policy change had created for the teaching of religion in public schools.

In a sense, the dual-mode RE curriculum's contradictions and educational ambiguity negate or minimise the educational contribution the curriculum can make to the national goals of education in Malawi. In fact, it would not be hard to conclude that the curriculum reflects lack of clarity on the part of the curriculum policy-makers as to what RE in Malawi should seek to achieve.

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[70] This is theorised in Chapter Nine, Section 9.2

Furthermore, by embracing two different spaces of RE at the same time, the curriculum seems to be more politically than educationally correct. Its educational contradictions and ambiguity were created in an attempt to accommodate the Christian and Muslim faith-communities demands for RE. While this is political, The Ministry of Education officials tended to downplay its political dimension. Probably, as policy-makers and bureaucrats, their desire was to justify the policy on educational grounds and make it educationally legitimate.

The next section presents the contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an asset for Malawi, using the perspectives of secondary school head teachers.

6.2.1   The Voice of Secondary School Head Teachers[71]

In this section, two themes are discussed, representing the voice of secondary school head teachers, with some statistical data inserted to expand the qualitative data in portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity for Malawi. The first theme represents the policy change as an initiative against segregation and intolerance, while the second as an opportunity for broadening learners' worldview.

6.2.1.1 Curriculum Policy Change as an Initiative against Segregation and Intolerance

Like some Ministry of Education officials, some secondary school head teachers also perceived the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity for Malawi to curb segregation and intolerance. Such understandings tended to reflect an attempt to justify the curriculum policy change on the basis of its contribution to the national goals of education in Malawi. For some head teachers, the policy change was understood as having the potential to promote civil toleration of differences. The inclusion of BK and RME was understood as working against segregation and intolerant culture, a positive move, in line with the ethos of a democratic and religiously pluralistic society.

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[71]The reader is reminded that the designation Secondary School Head Teacher is abbreviated as HT

Commenting on the curriculum's value in accommodating both Muslims and Christians, a head teacher (HT-48) made the following observation:

The development[72] is a good one because the previous curriculum was viewed by the Moslems as being segregative in that it was silent on their prophet Muhammad. In Mangochi[73] pupils would actually say [that] in the teacher's face and sometimes they would silently drop the subject despite it being core. Perhaps the dual curriculum serves to alleviate this irregularity (Questionnaire, HT-48).

The above understanding was partly informed by the history of RE in Malawi where only BK as a mono-faith syllabus was taught at secondary school level for a long time. In 2001, a multi-faith syllabus called RME was introduced parallel to the mono-faith syllabus. It was the offering of the mono-faith syllabus that was described as segregative against the Muslims. Although the dual-mode RE curriculum has a mono-faith syllabus alongside the multi-faith syllabus, it was understood as accommodating the Muslims whose faith was included in the curriculum for the first time in the history of education in Malawi. To that extent, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy's value was perceived as an opportunity for Malawi to promote social cohesion and mutual tolerance among people of different faith persuasions.

Another understanding portrayed the policy change as an opportunity, promoting civil toleration of differences among people. This was expressed by HT-35 as follows:

Ideally the teaching of BK and RME would be a reflection of two or so national aspirations: 1)The need to mould a religiously tolerant culture that fosters understanding and sympathy for other people's religious leanings. 2) The need to present without bias the basic teachings of the various religions and their contributions to our sense of morality and to enable a free choice of the individuals in embracing a particular faith (Questionnaire, HT-35).

Embedded in the above understanding was the assumption that, apart from promoting mutual tolerance, RE could make a contribution to the moral or character development of the learners. However, this understanding did not interrogate how such a contribution could be made within the two contradictory spaces of RE: the mono-faith and multi-faith

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[73] Mangochi is one of the districts in Malawi with a high population of members of the Muslim faith-community.

space. It was taken for granted that both BK and RME could make such a contribution. The curriculum's educational ambiguity was not problematised.

For instance, in response to the question on what the dual-mode RE curriculum was likely to promote, out of 53 head teachers, a majority of 33 (62%) said that it was most likely to promote tolerance among different faiths. 16 (30%) head teachers said it was most likely to lead learners to a clear understanding of religion while only 2 (4%) said it was most likely to promote disunity among different faiths. And another 2 (4%) said that it was most likely to lead learners to a confession of faith.[74]

One insight from these statistics is that the head teachers' understandings tended to attribute educational value to the policy change with regard to promoting mutual tolerance among people of different faiths. The understandings, however, fell short of problematising the dual-nature of the curriculum and how that negated or minimised its educational value.

HT-41 portrayed the policy's potential to promote mutual understanding and coexistence among the Christian and Muslim faith-communities as follows:

I personally believe teaching both BK and RME would assist to bring understanding between Christians and Moslems [sic] as they will learn to appreciate one another's faith, hence promote coexistence (Questionnaire, HT-41).

Thus, it can be argued that the above understanding was in line with the goal of nation-building which is crucial for the development of any country. However, looking at the statistics on decisions that schools were making in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, it is difficult to see how mutual understanding and appreciation between Christians and Muslims can be promoted under such implementation.

For instance, three forms of curriculum implementation decisions at school level were highlighted. Out of 53 head teachers, 35 (66%) said that they were offering BK only. 16

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[74] See Appendix 8: Table A8.8

(30%) said they were offering BK and RME as stipulated by the policy. And only 2 (4%) said they were offering RME only.[75]

One insight from these statistics is that, in the spirit of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy, only 30% of the schools, whose head teachers participated in the study, were implementing the policy as stipulated. The policy stipulates that schools should offer both BK and RME as optional subjects. However, a good number of schools (66%) preferred BK to RME while only a small proportion (4%) preferred RME to BK.

Another insight from these varied forms of curriculum implementation is that reform policies do not "automatically take precedence over all previous policies under which the system has operated" (Elmore, 1996, p. xxx). Thus, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy has not taken precedence over the old RE policy where BK was exclusively offered in schools. Another observation is that reform policies do not "operate in more or less the same way in whatever settings they are implemented" (Elmore, 1996, p. xxx). Thus, it is not surprising that there were such variations in decisions that schools were making in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The contention here is that such curriculum implementation variations were a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

Thus, within the theory of politics of the school curriculum, the variations could be an apparent contestation of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, reflected in the way the policy change was being implemented. They could, however, also be an indication that the policy was understood differently at school level.

For instance, statistics on how different head teachers understood the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change indicated that out of 53 head teachers, 22 (42%) said they understood the policy as saying that pupils should take either BK or RME as optional subjects. 12 (23%) understood the policy as saying that pupils can take both BK and RME. 13 (24%) understood the policy as saying that schools should offer either BK or

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[75] See Appendix 8:Table A8.5

RME as optional subjects. And 6 (11 %) understood the policy as saying that schools should offer either BK or RME as compulsory subjects.[76]

One observation from the above statistics is that the policy was subject to various interpretations at school level. Head teachers as leaders in making curriculum implementation decisions and choices had different understandings about the way in which the policy was to be implemented. Thus, as observed by Ball (1994) and Odden (1991), policy carries different meanings for different players as it moves from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice. It is the contention of this study that such different meanings reflect contesting spaces in curriculum policy change as well as politics of the school curriculum. In this case, the head teachers' understandings were different from those of the policy-makers.

Another head teachers' understanding about the policy's potential to promote mutual tolerance among people of different faiths was framed within the socio-political context in which the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced. This was expressed by HT-30 as follows:

The idea is a good one <u>but</u> [sic] came at a time when most Christian leaders felt that the country was on the verge of being Islamised! Whether this was political or other reasons I would not tell. I have a feeling though that since the reigning president was a Moslem and the introduction came that time, some leaders felt their claims had a base.

The Ministry of Education needs to civic educate the masses on the need for tolerance among faiths for although Malawi has only experienced pockets of religious intolerance, it could be just a question of time when this might get to full-scale misunderstandings-GOD FORBID [sic]. May mother Malawi remain peaceful for generations to come (Questionnaire, HT-30).

The above view seemed to acknowledge the potential contribution that the dual-mode RE curriculum can make to the promotion of civil toleration of differences among people. However, it was informed by the socio-political context in which the policy change was introduced. The introduction of the multi-faith syllabus, which covers the three main religious traditions of Malawi namely, Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religions, was closely associated with the then president who was a Muslim. Since it was

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[76] See Appendix 8: Table A8.4

for the first time in the history of Malawi that Islam was part of the RE curriculum, the policy change was seen as a directive from the president himself to have his religion - Islam - included in the school curriculum. The contention here is that this understanding represented a contesting space in curriculum policy change and an aspect of politics of the school curriculum.

Another head teachers' understanding portrayed the policy change as an opportunity for Malawi's democratic culture adopted in 1994. That culture came with the change from one-party dictatorship to multiparty democracy. HT-47 explained:

The teaching of BK only was good as we were in one party state where some people's rights were violated. In a democratic situation I think both BK and RME should be taught to give chance to those who would like to go for any of the two.

However, as old habits die hard, it cannot be simple to implement the change as some people think it is just a matter of promoting a certain denominational religion (Questionnaire, HT-47).

One insight from the above comment is that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was understood as respecting the rights of people of other religions apart from members of the Christian faith. This understanding also acknowledged politics of the school curriculum in which some people contested and suspected the curriculum as a way of promoting other religions. To that extent, it resonates with what Darling-Hammond (1998) describes as the difficulty of getting any policy change beyond bureaucracy. The dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was subject to contestation by people who understood it differently. Such contestation portrayed the curriculum as a hotly contested space (Apple, 2004; Kelly, 1999).

Furthermore, the head teachers seemed to perceive the educational value of the policy change in terms of promoting mutual tolerance and appreciation among people of diverse religious background. However, there was no indication of their awareness of the contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum. By embracing the mono-faith and multi-faith space, the curriculum had created educational ambiguities and contradictions in terms of what is to be achieved at the educational level. As Fullan (1993) argues, any curriculum initiative must state clearly what it seeks to do at the level

of education. Thus, it can be argued that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change failed to meet this requirement by promoting ontological, epistemological, and methodological contradictions. This failure implies that the educational benefits accruing from each RE space are different. As such, the policy promotes contradictions in terms of its contribution to the attainment of the national goals of education. However, the above head teachers' understandings fell short of articulating these contradictions.

The next sub-section discusses the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy as an opportunity for Malawi to broaden learners' worldview in matters of religion.

6.2.2.2   Curriculum Policy Change Broadening Learners' Worldview

Some understandings by the head teachers portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity for meeting Malawi's academic needs. This was in terms of widening the learners' worldview or cognitive horizons. The claim was that the curriculum has the potential to help learners develop the intellectual ability to see and understand the world from a wider view as opposed to the previous curriculum where one religion was taught.

Commenting on the contribution that the dual-mode RE curriculum can make to the development of the learners' worldview, HT-28 declared:

I strongly feel that BK and RME should be taught in schools. The general perception I have is that widening the students' knowledge in Religious Education is good for their future life/skills. The teaching of BK only restricts pupils' scope of knowledge in having a wider view of the world. The students' upbringing in life will be better if they could have a stronger, wider base of knowledge and approach to life. In the present day where a wide number of students shun or run away from Sciences in our schools, it would give them a wider range of options to offer if BK and RME were taught (Questionnaire, HT-28).

An observation here is that the above view took the educational value of the dual-mode RE for granted without interrogating its educational ambiguity created by the two syllabuses of BK and RME.

HT-1 understood the educational value of the policy change in terms of promoting mutual understanding and appreciation among learners as follows:

The teaching of BK and RME is a good development because pupils of the Muslim faith are given an opportunity to learn more about their faith and the same with Christians. RME emphasises on Muslim teaching while BK on Christianity. (Questionnaire, HT-1)

Three points can be raised here based on the above view. Firstly, an impression is given that BK is for Christians and RME is for Muslims. This impression contradicts the claim that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change has the potential to promote social cohesion among people. If anything, the policy change has the potential to create religious apartheid in the school (Summers, 1996), among Christian and Muslims in Malawi.

Secondly, the understanding that BK is for Christians whilst RME is for Muslims reflects a conception of RE as a religious activity (Hull, 1984). Such a conception of RE in public schools has been criticised on the premise that it is the duty of the faith-communities and families to promote the propagation and transmission of faith, not of the public school serving learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds (Chidester et al, 1994; Hull, 2007; Smart, 1998; Steyn, 2004; Summers, 1996). The critics argue that for RE to be included in the public school, it should be conceptualised as an educational activity, with the aim of helping learners to develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion as a dimension of human and social life (Carr, 2007; Hull, 2007).

Thirdly, the claim that RME emphasises Islam or it is for Muslims is a misrepresentation. For one thing, part of the syllabus rationale states that RME is multi-faith in approach, "cutting across the three major religions of Malawi, namely Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions" (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. iv). Thus, in terms of thematic coverage, the three religions are dealt with in equal proportion, with each theme cutting across each religion. Thus, the claim can be seen as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum and that policy carries different meanings for different social actors in society from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice (Ball, 1994; Odden, 1991).

Furthermore, the understanding that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change has the potential to widen the worldview of the learners was corroborated by HT-29, who stated that:

The change from teaching of BK only to the teaching of BK and RME in schools was done in good faith. Pupils…are able to understand different types of religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and others. It clears misconceptions about other religions and as such the faith [-communities] can live in harmony and peace. The learners can have a choice of subjects (between RME and BK) of their liking. I like this change because it brings wide understanding of religions of the world, their history, failures and successes (Questionnaire, HT-29).

A rejoinder to the above view could be that the opportunity for a wide understanding of religions of the world is available only in RME because of its multi-faith approach. BK does not have the curriculum space for wide understanding of religions because of its mono-faith approach. So it is only in the multi-faith space where misconceptions about other religions could be cleared while promoting peace and harmony among people of different faiths. Multi-faith RE promotes a discursive space for dialogue across difference. To that extent, it has the potential to promote mutual understanding and tolerance among people of different faiths.

However, the understanding that only the RME syllabus has the space to widen learners' knowledge and understanding of religion was expressed by HT-19 as follows:

I am of the view that RME is a good subject because it will widen the students' scope on religious issues. It will open their mind that when we talk about religion we are not talking about Christianity only. However, a good approach has to be followed. All stakeholders have to be consulted so that there should not be any resistance (Questionnaire, HT-19).

Thus, while other understandings tended to generalise the academic potential of the policy to both BK and RME, the above understanding pointed out that such potential was only available in the RME syllabus. Furthermore, implied in the above understanding was the assumption that there was no consultation of all stakeholders prior to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum, leading to resistance from some stakeholders.   Such a view reflects politics of the school curriculum and a contesting space in the dual-mode

RE curriculum policy change since consultation had been done prior to the introduction of the policy.

In addition, some head teachers' understandings acknowledged the potential of the policy change to promote learners' moral or character development as well as cultural and religious literacy. Moral or character development can be described as the development of socially acceptable code of ethics or moral principles about what is right or wrong, good or bad. Cultural literacy can be described as one's capacity to appreciate the value of culture for an individual and groups of people in society and the world in which we live as well as respecting one's and other people's cultures. On the other hand, religious literacy, as used in this study, implies one's capacity to appreciate the role of faith or religion in the lives of individuals and groups of people as well as the capacity to respect other people's religious or non-religious stances.

On the dual-mode RE curriculum's potential to promote learners' moral development and respect for other people's religion, HT-27 commented that:

The teaching of BK and RME stands to help the pupils develop good morals, understand their and other people's religion, respect other religions and accept views of people of other religions (Questionnaire, HT-27).

Statistics data generated about head teachers' understanding about the aim of RE in schools indicated that out of the 53 head teachers, 35 (66%) said the aim was to help pupils understand their religion and the religions of other people; 16 (30%) said the aim was to help pupils develop good morals; and only 2 (4%) said the aim was to help pupils grow in faith.[77]

One insight from these statistics is that many head teachers understood RE as an educational activity, intending to promote moral development and religious literacy of the learners. This view foregrounded critical knowledge and understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life. Promoting understanding of each other' religion among learners was seen as the major contribution that RE should make in the school curriculum. For instance, 30% of the head teachers understood RE as a moral

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[77] See Appendix 8: Table A8.3

activity whose aim is to help learners develop good morals, values, and attitudes for the learners to become acceptable members of the society. Moral or character development of the learners was seen as one contribution RE can make in the public schools. Apparently, the fact that only 4% of the head teachers said the aim of RE was to help learners grow in faith could be an indication that a small proportion of head teachers still conceptualised the teaching of religion in public schools as a religious, not educational, activity.

Thus, the above head teachers' views reflected some perceived educational benefits that can accrue from the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, resonating with what Chidester et al (1994) describe as greater understanding of self and others, the clarification of values and cultural literacy.

However, the promotion of learners' moral development, cultural and religious literacy might be difficult to achieve through the dual-mode RE curriculum, given its two different and oppositional spaces: the mono-faith and the multi-faith space. BK is taught in the mono-faith where the Christian faith is covered at the exclusion of other faiths. While such an approach can promote moral development of the learners and help them to understand Christianity, it cannot help learners to understand other religions apart from Christianity. As such, it would be difficult to justify the perception that BK has the potential to enable learners develop respect for other religions. The discursive space for dialogue across difference is non-existent in the mono-faith space. However, in the case of RME, such a space is available because of its multi-faith approach where Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions are taught.

The claim here is that the head teachers' understandings foregrounded the perceived educational value of the policy without acknowledging and problematising the ontological, epistemological, and methodological contradictions embedded in the dual-nature of the curriculum.

In the next section, I discuss the understandings regarding the policy change from the perspective of the faith-community leaders.

6.2.3   The Voice of Faith-Community Leaders[78]

Under this section the voice of faith-community leaders, portraying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity for Malawi, is represented under five themes. The first theme portrays the policy change as upholding people's democratic rights and freedom of worship. The second theme portrays the value of the policy change with respect to academic, moral and spiritual growth. The third theme values the policy as a compromise between Christian and Muslim faith-community's demands while fourth as being in line with Malawi's constitution. The fifth theme portrays the policy as good for moral education and tolerance.

The policy's value as an opportunity for Malawi to uphold democratic rights and freedom of worship is discussed in the next sub-section.

6.2.3.1   Curriculum Policy Change Upholding People's Democratic Rights and Freedom   of Worship

Some of the faith-community leaders' understandings portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum as an opportunity in terms of upholding people's democratic rights and freedom of worship. To that effect, the policy was understood as relevant and responding to people's needs in Malawi. The inclusion of BK and RME was interpreted as being in line with the ethos of democracy and freedom of worship. The policy was understood as shaping and guiding the provision of RE in accordance with the wishes, interests, and aspirations of the people of Malawi. The existence of people with different religious identities within the same geographical/physical space reflects religious diversity. The claim here is that the RE curriculum should be designed to reflect the religious diversity of the society. The dual-mode RE curriculum policy was understood in that sense. It should be pointed out here that interpreting the policy as upholding freedom of worship should be challenged because RE is now not included in the school curriculum for

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[78] Faith-Community Leader is abbreviated as FC in presenting the findings.

worship but educational purposes. However, it shows the ideological difference between

the government and some of the faith-communities.

With reference to the relevance of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy in the context of

Malawi's democracy, one faith-community leader (FC-4) commented:

*The Ministry [of Education] was trying to make education relevant, because an
education that sounds good on a paper plan but does not meet the needs of the people is
not a good education at all. So, by introducing this type of policy, the Ministry was
actually responding to the needs of the people it is educating. So, the Ministry could not
impose a policy which the people it is educating were not happy with. So, since the
people spoke against the earlier policy which the Ministry introduced – this one of the
Religious and Moral Education - the people were trying to say we are not happy with that
type of education; this education is not relevant to us. So, the people dictated what was
relevant to the nation. So, the Ministry was just responding. So, I think by doing that, the
Ministry did a good thing because it is trying to provide an education that is relevant to
the people and that is trying to safeguard the democratic rights of the people (Interview,
FC-4).*

To emphasise the relevance of the policy change within Malawi's socio-political context,

FC-4 continued:

*My other comment is that I think this issue of Religious Education is a volatile issue and I
would want to repeat that government did the best to accept the will of the people to
determine the course. And in fact, even our own Education Act, which is as old as the
1960s had this clearly stipulated that parents would be given a chance to choose subjects
which their children should learn in the area of faith. So the people were just expressing
that type of legal statute which is already in our Education Act (Interview, FC-4).*

The above understanding was framed within the context of the controversy that arose in

Malawi in 2000 when the Ministry of Education introduced RME as a multi-faith

syllabus to replace BK as a mono-faith syllabus (See Chapter Two). On the one hand, the

dual-mode RE curriculum policy was introduced as a compromise to accommodate the

Christian faith-communities' demands for mono-faith RE in the form of BK. On the other

hand, it was to accommodate demands for multi-faith RE supported by the government

and the Muslim faith-community. For the above faith-community leader, such

accommodation was understood as meeting Malawi's Education Act on RE.

What is clear, however, is that the introduction of multi-faith RE was in line with the

government's desire to create a curriculum space in public schools for the cultivation of

critical knowledge and understanding of religion among learners. As Chidester et al (1994, p. 45) observe, the primary aim of a multi-faith approach "is to provide students with an opportunity to learn about religion by studying actual religions." The introduction of multi-faith RE, as a replacement of mono-faith RE, was not welcomed by the Christian faith-community leaders.

The controversy that arose following the introduction of RME as a multi-faith syllabus was also covered in some of Malawi's newspapers. For example, the *Nation* newspaper article titled "Christians uphold Bible Knowledge" (Chitosi, 2000, p. 1), reported the Christian faith-communities' contestation as follows:

> A high level meeting of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) and Malawi Council of Churches (MCM) held yesterday in Lilongwe unanimously supported the suspension of Moral and Religious Education (MRE), a multi-faith subject, and recommended the retention of Bible Knowledge in schools…(Nation Newspaper, 14th March, 2000).

The above newspaper article went on to cite a joint statement issued by the Christian faith-communities in their opposition to the multi-faith syllabus as follows:

> Therefore the representatives of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi and Malawi Council of Churches made the following recommendations that the current syllabus, namely Bible Knowledge, be upheld in secondary schools and the proposed religious education for primary schools which was introduced without consultation be withdrawn and religious education previously taught be upheld.

It was in this socio-political context, marked by the controversy over government's attempt to change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE at secondary school level, that the dual-mode curriculum policy change was understood. However, it was only the Christian faith-communities, not all people of Malawi, who publicly contested the policy change.

It can be argued that the opposition to the multi-faith syllabus was based on religious grounds where the Christian faith-communities still wanted to use religion as a means of promoting faith among the learners. One Christian faith-community is on record of rejecting the government's pedagogical approach to RE that sidelines conversion. The following extract from minutes of the national curriculum consultation, which led to the

introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy, reflects the conception of RE as a

religious and confessional activity:

> [FC-2] suspects RME is bent to promote certain religious beliefs… [and]
> wonders why RME should replace a syllabus that serves the interests of
> the people best. Churches establish schools to teach the Bible and
> therefore, the Bible cannot just be replaced anyhow… [FC-2] does not
> accept the pedagogical approach that only imparts knowledge without
> conversion. To [FC-2] conversion and teaching are complementary
> (Minutes, First National Consultative Meeting on Religious and Moral
> Education Controversy, p. 12).

Thus, the above understanding reflected a contesting space based on the confessional

approach to RE.

Another understanding by some faith-community leaders portrayed the curriculum's

value as an opportunity for Malawi's religious pluralism. For instance, FC-4 responded:

*I think bearing in mind that as a country we have people belonging to different camps in
terms of religious circles, our view is… [the dual-mode RE curriculum] is good,
especially if the approach is trying to balance…that …on the one hand there is Bible
Knowledge, on the other hand there are these religious education and moral education
stuff. We don't have a problem with that (Interview, FC-5).*

Similar sentiments were expressed by FC-6 who understood the policy change as an

attempt by Malawi's government to accommodate all people in the context of religious

pluralism and freedom of worship, as follows:

*I want to believe that may be they wanted to incorporate different beliefs that various
people have. Because as you are aware, in the world there are so many types of beliefs
that are there and some are still coming. So may be because of this issue of freedom of
worship, the government wanted to impress all the other faiths (Interview, FC-6).*

In a similar vein, FC-1 described the value of the policy change as:

*The rationale behind [the dual-mode RE curriculum] was that as a child or student
grows up, he or she should grow up knowing about one another's religion - about all
religions in Malawi equally or an equal basis. …the policy that was decided by the
Ministry of Education was to teach both Bible Knowledge… and…Religious and Moral
Education side by side (Interview, FC-1).*

FC-1 further commented on the stance of their faith-community with regard to the policy change:

However…[we] have no problem to learn about [other religions] as such, since [we] are encouraged by [our] religion to learn about other...religions. ...in this age or in this atmosphere or what we call multicultural society…. we needed to have both subjects…presented to our students, whether Christian or Muslim. We believe that when school children or Malawians, as citizens, get to know each other at an early age, they will not have some bigotry or prejudices, when they grow up. They will have known each better than remain in ignorance. So we expected that those who introduced this… multi-faith syllabus wanted to create Malawian citizens who knew each other's religion better (Interview, FC-1).

Thus, the dual-mode RE curriculum was understood as an opportunity in the context of Malawi's democratic and religiously diverse society, with the potential to benefit Malawi in promoting mutual tolerance and appreciation among people of different religions. However, the issue of how this potential could be realised in the two RE spaces of BK and RME was not problematised. The curriculum's educational value was taken for granted and tended to mask the curriculum's educational contradictions. This observation develops into the thesis of the study in Chapter Nine.

The next sub-section discusses the policy change as an opportunity for the growth of the learners academically, morally, and spiritually.

6.2.3.2 Curriculum Policy Change for Academic, Moral and Spiritual Growth

Some understandings by the faith-community leaders portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity for Malawi to promote the learners' academic, moral and spiritual growth, which should accompany their physical growth. In terms of academic growth, the policy was portrayed as having the potential to help learners develop knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon in a religiously diverse society.

However, the claim here is that this perceived value is negated or minimised by the mono-faith space. It is only the multi-faith space of RME that can make a greater contribution to widening the learner's worldview, not the mono-faith space of BK. In the

mono-faith space, the teaching of religion is limited to one faith while in the multi-faith space the teaching of religion is based on many faiths. The understandings by the faith-communities were silent on this, giving the impression that they did not perceive any problems with the curriculum's contradictory spaces. It could also mean that the two spaces were not perceived as contradictory at all.

Speaking in favour of teaching RE in school in general, not specifically the dual-mode RE curriculum, FC-3 explained:

And several things happen when you teach Religious Education. Just to give you a few, first of all, when Religious Education is taught, the children are academically challenged; they begin to think. And it promotes open enquiry and discussion about religion amongst themselves…It also helps in all aspects of human life…and Religious Education is very close to relevant life situations. So we would like Religious Education to be part of the school curriculum because of that. It also provides the children with worldviews about religion and tradition and faith; so that at least their mind should not be focused on their religion alone or their faith but they should be open so that they learn the other religions. So basically we want as the student grows up, his moral and spiritual growth goes together with his physical development (Interview, FC-3).

The above understanding suggests a number of benefits that can accrue from the RE in schools. Such benefits include academic, moral and spiritual growth which can contribute to the individuation and humanisation of learners. By individuation I mean the individual growth of learners according to their unique potential whereas humanisation denotes the growth of learners as members of humanity, according to their potential. However, the question here is: how can the dual-mode RE curriculum make such a contribution, given its oppositional spaces? If anything, its two RE curriculum spaces have the potential to promote contradictory moral and spiritual growth of the learners. It is only multi-faith, not mono-faith RE, that can promote constructive dialogue across difference.

Another understanding portrayed the dual-mode RE policy change as an opportunity to curb fanaticism and bigotry. For instance, FC-4 declared:

… if children are brought up to only talk about one faith without appreciating what the other faith is saying, there might be danger of creating extremists (Interview, FC-4).

Missing in the above view was the awareness that appreciation of other people's faiths can be cultivated in the multi-faith space where constructive dialogue across difference is possible. Thus, it is only RME, not BK, which has such a potential to curb fanaticism and bigotry among learners. However, the various understandings were silent on this issue.

In addition other understandings portrayed the curriculum's value as an opportunity to widen the learners' worldview, but with regard to their moral or character development. This was expressed by FC-5 as follows:

Because I think the school system exists to serve a certain function; to prepare people to be functional in society, to be good citizens. [Religious Education] can be a vehicle through which some values are transmitted to our young people and to the society at large or to the Malawian nation. We are trying to build some form of Malawi focussing on values that we feel are good for Malawi and… for us as human beings. So, I think it should be taught. But then you are aware that there are… different sides across… the religious divide. There is a Christian aspect and the other forms of faith; and I guess that's where issues begin to rise. But our view is that: that should be there (Interview, FC-5).

While hinting on the perceived educational value of RE in terms of moral education of learners, the above understanding also alluded to the problems surrounding the practicality of the dual-mode RE policy. The claim was that the curriculum could contribute to the learners' knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon and to their intellectual and moral development. But the diversity of religions creates practical problems on how the curriculum can make that contribution.

This theme reflects the perceived relationship between religion and morality as well as religious and moral education in society. As ter Haar (1990, p. 123) observes, "Religious and moral education are in Africa regarded as two sides of the same coin." This connection continues to be one of the reasons why the inclusion of RE in the school curriculum gets government support. Kapenzi (1979) and ter Haar (1990) suggest that although RE is not considered in a priority in education by most present governments in many African countries it does not receive a hostile attitude. This situation arises because of the feeling that "without the basis afforded by religion, the State cannot promote sound character and stable citizenship" (Kapenzi, 1979, p. 72).

However, it can be argued that the perceived practical problems reflect politics of the school curriculum. The situation may become problematic when different faith-communities want their respective religions to be privileged in the school curriculum. One implication would be that faith-communities need to revisit their respective educational ideologies in relation to the teaching of religion in public schools. A distinction should be made between confessional and non-confessional RE (Carr, 2007); between the conception of RE as a religious and an educational activity (Hull, 1984).

One way in which the practical problems can be overcome would be following de Gruchy's (2007) advice that good practice in public theology and in a democratic society requires promoting the common good by witnessing to the core values rather than seeking privilege for a particular religion. To this end, faith-communities and other stakeholders in education need to transcend their partisan interests in RE. Such transcendence should be informed by the desire to promote a common project of RE, aimed at constructive dialogue across difference. Such a project would make the dual-mode RE curriculum unsuitable for public schools serving learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds because of its contradictory RE spaces.

The policy's value as an opportunity for a compromise between Christian and Muslim faith communities is presented and discussed in the next sub-section.

6.2.3.3 Curriculum Policy Change as a Compromise between Christian and Muslim Faith- Communities' Demands

Some understandings by faith-community leaders portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a compromise between the competing demands by the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. The government had wanted RME to replace BK in 2000, but that was resisted by the Christian faith-communities. On the other hand, the Muslim faith-community was in support of replacing BK with RME. As a compromise, the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced in 2001. To that extent, the policy change was perceived as a response to Malawi's socio-political context. Through

the policy change, the government managed to come up with a compromise aimed at maintaining peace among people of different religious persuasions. This understanding resonates with the notion that maintaining peace and unity is an escapable duty of any government, which can be done by aligning the national curriculum to the political vision (Harley & Wedekind, 2004).

FC-4 comments on the dual-mode RE as a curriculum compromise, as follows:

We see strength [in the dual-mode RE curriculum] in the sense that I think…faiths are not compatible. A bloc of faith takes their faith as the last; another bloc of faith takes their faith as the last. So for us in the Christian bloc, it is strength because we maintain our faith and we ensure that our children are socialised into the faith and they grow into sound Christians (Interview, FC-4).

The above understanding revealed a conception of the dual-mode RE curriculum based on religious grounds. The policy change was hailed as providing curriculum space for the initiation of learners into respective faith-traditions. Such a conception is described as confessional (Carr, 2007). Its goal is to lead learners to a confession of and commitment to a particular faith (Wood, 1984). Criticising such an approach, Hull (2007) argues that it is the business of each religion or faith-community to promote its own faith, not of the publicly funded state education system. Yet, the above understanding portrayed the policy's value in terms of the opportunities for faith-communities to promote faith among learners.

Another understanding portrayed the policy change as an opportunity for Malawi to safeguard the rights of people in learning RE, in accordance with their respective faith convictions. The policy was also understood as relevant to the needs and interests of the learners and parents, as FC-4 stated:

So in the area of allowing pupils' specialisation according to their interests, according to their cultural values, according to their capacity, I think the policy is working to safeguard that right of the child to learn and the right of the parents to choose what their children should learn. But in terms of other advantage…education has to be relevant to the needs of the people. And if the people in Malawi need peace and value peace, at best, it is important that the way we teach subjects which involve people's emotions should safeguard that peace (Interview, FC-4).

Here, apart from upholding the rights of learners and parents, the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was understood from the perspective of maintaining peace among people of different religious convictions. The policy was an attempt by government to provide a win-win situation for people with competing demands and ideologies. However, the criticism could be that the mono-faith and multi-faith RE spaces have the effect of negating or minimising the curriculum's potential to promote peace among the learners. Multi-faith RE promotes constructive dialogue across different religions while mono-faith RE promotes exclusivism and hegemony, by privileging one religion over other religions. Despite that, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy managed to resolve the controversy that arose following the introduction of RME, as a replacement of BK.

Some of the faith-communities also understood the policy change as government's attempt to accommodate the pressure that had come from the Christian faith-communities in contesting the replacement of BK with RME. This was expressed by FC-3:

Because there was pressure from the Christians, very powerful pressure, so it was sort of pacifying that, to make sure that there was a win-win situation. Because you would see in the discussions that our colleagues - I am sorry to say, the Muslim Association of Malawi - even said [Religious Education] can cause war in Malawi. So we were surprised that how can this subject bring war to Malawi. So perhaps that was a way of simply pacifying them and pacifying the Christians, so that there is peace between us (Interview, FC-3).

FC-2 responded to the issue of policy change as follows:

As I said in my explanation, the side by side issue was more political because initially we were told that Religious and Moral Education was replacing Bible Knowledge. ...And it was supposed to be a [core] subject not an elective. It was compulsory that each and every student was to do Religious and Moral Education. So because of the outcry from the churches, the president became sensitive because people were indeed referring to it as Islamisation propaganda. So to protect himself that's why he said - well - let them go side by side. ... The Church was protesting the removal of Bible Knowledge and completely replacing it with Religious and Moral Education. So that is why they were placed side by side (interview, FC-2).

Thus, with regard to Malawi's socio-political context, the policy was perceived as a strategy by the government to be fair to all faith-communities in matters of RE. The impression given here is that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy is fair to the various faith-communities in Malawi. However, the fact is that only three religions are covered in the multi-faith RE curriculum namely, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional

Religions, yet there are other religions in Malawi, though in a minority. The alluded space of contestation in the above understanding was the replacement of BK with RME, which meant replacing mono-faith with multi-faith RE.

The perceived value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity to uphold Malawi's constitution is discussed in the next sub-section.

6.2.3.4   Curriculum Policy Change in Accordance with Malawi's Constitution

Under this theme, some understandings by faith-communities portrayed   the value of the dual-mode RE as an opportunity to uphold Malawi's constitution in matters of religion and education. The policy change was understood as meeting Malawi's constitutional provision on RE in schools as well as Malawi's national goals of education. It is interesting to note that this understanding was clearly expressed by the faith-community leaders, not by The Ministry of Education officials and secondary school head teachers. It can be argued that, probably the faith-community leaders referred to Malawi's constitution to justify their confessional understanding of RE. Their concern was to promote faith among learners. In that case, reference to the constitution was made to legitimize that concern.

 In particular, Malawi's Education Act, as stated in section 25 of the constitution, stipulates three issues. The first is that Malawi shall teach Religious Instruction in public and assisted[79] schools. The second stipulation is that private schools shall have the liberty to develop their own Religious Instruction to be approved by The Ministry of Education. Thirdly, the Act also stipulates that parents have the liberty to advise school management to exempt their children from learning a religious syllabus that is not in their favour. Thus, in the light of this constitutional provision, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was understood as an attempt by government to uphold the people's constitutional rights in a democratic and religiously pluralist society. It can be argued that this line of thought can imply that the curriculum's educational contradictions are justified by a constitutional provision.

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[79] This is another term for grant-aided schools.

However, the framing of the above Education Act was premised on the conception of RE as a religious or worship activity. In that sense, it was meant to guarantee and safeguard freedom of worship in the school among learners of different faith convictions and according to the wishes of the learners' parents as well. Thus, this constitutional provision does not, at least clearly, conceptualise RE as an educational activity, in which learners from different religious and non-religious backgrounds can take part. The intention of RE was not academic but promoting worship among learners. To this extent, the Education Act reflects a confessional understanding of RE (Carr, 2007), concerned with leading learners to a confession of and commitment to a faith (Grimmitt, 2007; Hull, 2007). This confessional understanding is reflected in the use of the expression "Religious Instruction", which, in the discourse of RE curriculum theory and practice, is described as confessional or dogmatic RE (as discussed in Chapter Four, Section, 4.6).

Thus, understanding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy's value within the framework of the above constitutional provision reduces its justification on educational grounds. The inclusion of RE in the school curriculum becomes justifiable on religious, not academic, grounds. Because faith-communities are concerned with the transmission and propagation of their faith, they foregrounded promotion of faith among learners. The constitution was used to strengthen their case for and legitimate RE serving their confessional interests.

FC-3 pointed out that:

I think in my perception, it's because of the constitution. The constitution offers freedom of worship in Malawi. So, where there is freedom of worship, let the people worship the way they want. Let them be instructed in the manner that they want. So, perhaps they felt that as Ministry, let's give them the freedom. Let the Christians follow what they want; let's help them develop the guidelines for teaching. And also people who do not believe in Christianity but believe in only to understand about religion, let's also give them an opportunity to understand about other religions. So, basically, I think it all emanates from the constitution of this country; that is freedom of worship (Interview, FC-3).

It can be argued that, although informed by Malawi's constitution, the above understanding foregrounded the conception of RE as a religious activity (Hull, 1984), with worship as its goal. However, the contention here is that RE for public schools should be non-confessional, aiming at leading learners to a critical knowledge and

understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life. Confessional RE should be the responsibility of the faith-communities or families of the learners (Hull, 2007).

One point to note here is that the above contention does not mean schools cannot be used as spaces for confessional or religious activities. It is possible for faith-communities, on their own, to arrange with school management to visit schools and meet learners for faith education or religious instruction in their respective faiths. Otherwise, as a school subject, the point of RE should be education and not faith (Wood, 1984).

In the above understanding (FC-3), the non-confessional approach to RE adopted in the multi-faith syllabus was accepted but as an alternative for those people who conceptualise RE as an educational activity. However, advocating a mono-faith approach restricts the academic freedom of learners to develop knowledge and understanding of religion as a dimension of human and social life. Chapter Five, Section 33 of the Malawi Constitution (2002) provides that, "Every person has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, belief and thought, and to academic freedom". Thus, both freedom of worship and academic freedom are enshrined in the constitution.

Another criticism would be that the dual-mode RE curriculum places the school in an ambiguous position in terms of the nature and purpose of RE, given the above constitutional provision for both freedom of worship and academic freedom. As a result, educational ambiguity is created due to the existence of the mono-faith and multi-faith spaces, with their oppositional ontology, epistemology, and methodology of RE.

The point here is that, whilst it is true that Malawi's constitution provides for freedom of worship, such a provision is meant to protect one's right to freedom of conscience, not to limit one's academic freedom. RE as an educational activity is meant to contribute to the national goals of education, by helping learners develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion in the world and society in which they live. Promoting faith among learners is not one of the national goals of education in Malawi. That is the duty of faith-communities or families.

In addition, it can be pointed out that freedom of worship as provided by Malawi's Constitution gives freedom to faith-communities to practise their faith without being suppressed. But, it does not imply that faith-communities should demand the inclusion of RE in public education for the transmission of their respective faiths. Conceptualising RE as a means of faith-promotion among learners can render the subject volatile and "a divisive and not a reconciling force in society" (Summers, 1996, p. 10). To avoid that, it is important that RE in public schools should be offered as an educational activity, without seeking to privilege or elevate one religion over other religions.

However, there were some understandings by the faith community leaders that portrayed the policy's value in relation to Malawi's national goals of education. One of the national goals is that of helping learners develop mutual tolerance despite their differences.

Commenting on the curriculum's potential to promote civil toleration of differences, FC-1 expressed the view that:

The rationale behind [the curriculum policy change] was that, as a child or student grows up, he or she should grow up knowing about one another's religion or about all religions in Malawi equally or an equal basis….the policy that was decided by the Ministry of Education was to teach both Bible Knowledge… and Religious and Moral Education side by side but as optional subjects. …We believe that when school children or when Malawians as citizens get to know about each other at an early age, they will not have some bigotry or prejudices…. They will have known each other better than remain in ignorance (Interview, FC-1).

The above understanding highlighted a rationale resonating with that of the multi-faith syllabus of RME.[80] For the first time in the history of secondary school education in Malawi, Islam and African Traditional Religion were included in the RE curriculum alongside Christianity. Thus, RME was perceived to have the value of promoting a sense of mutual appreciation and tolerance among people of different faiths. To this end, RME had educational value in the context of Malawi's religious diversity and national goals of education.

The multi-faith space has the potential to help learners get rid of bigotry and prejudices against people of other religions. In the words of Chidester et al (1994, p. 45), the multi-

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[80] As discussed in Chapter Two, Subsection 2.4.2.4

faith approach is understood as having the potential to promote, among the learners, "greater understanding of self and others, the clarification of values, cultural literacy, and civil toleration of differences". In the words of the above faith-community leader (FC-1), the multi-faith approach can help learners to know "each other better than remain in ignorance."

The next sub-section discusses the perceived value of the policy as an opportunity for Malawi to promote moral education and tolerance.

6.2.3.5   Curriculum Policy Change for Moral Education and Tolerance

Some understandings by the faith-community leaders portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an opportunity to promote moral education and tolerance among learners in Malawi. FC-2 responded that:

There is big concern that currently there is moral degradation in our society. Secondly, we have come under a situation where there is conflict between religions. ...So you see that now some of these clashes are coming in because we are failing to appreciate one another's religion. If Christians were able to know what Muslims believe in and where we differ and vice versa, maybe we would have time enough to respect each other's religion and still live together despite being different. So perhaps that subject would most assist because if you are teaching Religious and Moral Education and it also helps you to understand what others believe in and eventually you grow up with an understanding of other religions (Interview, FC-2).

The claim in the above understanding was that the dual-mode RE curriculum has the potential to promote civil toleration of differences. However, this claim cannot be supported by BK because of its mono-faith space, which excludes other religions. Such a claim, however, can be justified by the RME syllabus because of its multi-faith space. Such justification is reflected in RME syllabus rationale (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. iv), which reads in part as follows:

> The syllabus will enable students to appreciate moral, social, spiritual and cultural values from more than one religion. They should also understand concepts, skills, values and attitudes involved in understanding different religions and how these affect the lives of people.

The contention here is that the claim that the dual-mode RE curriculum can promote tolerance is questionable because of its two different contradictory spaces. This contention is substantiated further by the fact that the Christian faith-communities were in support of BK while the Muslim faith-communities favoured RME. This divided support was reflected in the view of FC-4:

I hail the Ministry for having listened to the people in 2000 and come up with this policy. Because the policy is just showing us what the Malawi population is saying. ...for example, the other groups are saying we don't want our children to be forced to learn Bible Knowledge, and the other group is saying we don't want our children to be forced to learn the other faiths like Islam and Buddhism and etc (Interview, FC-4).

This understanding was an indirect admission that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is accommodating two contesting spaces of RE, reflecting spaces of intolerance between supporters of mono-faith and multi-faith RE. It also resonated with what some of the head teachers said about how the faith-communities were influencing the implementation of the policy in schools. Statistics indicated that out of 51 head teachers, 36 (70%) said the Christian faith-communities supported BK while the Muslim faith-communities supported RME.[81]

One insight here is that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy seems to have created "religious apartheid" (Summers, 1996, p. 11) in schools. The competing demands for RE between Christian and Muslim faith-communities had created contesting spaces in curriculum policy change, rendering the curriculum as a "battleground for many competing influences and ideologies" (Kelly, 1999. p. 167). The overarching argument of the study is that such contesting spaces in curriculum policy change manifest politics of the school curriculum.

The next section presents a summary of Chapter Six.

6.3.   Chapter Summary

This chapter has analysed and theorised the contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the opportunities of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for Malawi,

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[81] See Appendix 8: Table A8.11

within the framework of politics of the school curriculum. Perspectives of The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders have been presented. The voice of each category of the three research participants has been presented and heard separately to illuminate some contesting spaces in curriculum policy change. The essence of the various contesting spaces has illuminated the perceived value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, in terms of opportunities, by the three categories of the research participants. The substantive claim is that the contesting spaces were a reflection of dynamics of politics of the school curriculum. They manifested disagreements about the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum while reflecting that policy carries different meanings for different people in society. Although there were some commonalities between the understandings, each category of research participants tended to foreground different aspects.

For The Ministry of Education officials, the main concern was justifying the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change and the need to get it beyond bureaucracy into practice. For the secondary school head teachers, the concern was mainly academic with the intention of rationalising and justifying the contribution of the policy change in line with Malawi's national goals of education. And for the faith-communities, the concern was to justify and rationalise the perceived value of the curriculum policy change, with a covert aim of using RE in public schools to promote knowledge and understanding about their respective religions as well as spiritual and moral growth of the learners.

The substantive argument is that although the contesting spaces portrayed the opportunities of the dual-mode RE curriculum for Malawi, they did not consider the dual-nature of the curriculum as problematic despite its educational contradictions. The contradictions arise from the curriculum's mono-faith and multi-faith RE spaces. Thus, in effect, the curriculum's perceived value tended to mask its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value. The study argues that the real value was political, creating a win-win situation for the supporters of BK and RME respectively. This finding has eventually matured into the thesis of the study as postulated in Chapter Nine.

In Chapter Seven, I analyse and theorise about the contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in terms of its perceived weaknesses for Malawi.

Chapter Seven

Politics of the School Curriculum Two: Weaknesses and/or Threats of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum for Malawi

7.1   Introduction

Like the preceding chapter, this chapter presents findings of the first-level analysis and interpretation of the research findings. It focuses on the dual-mode RE curriculum as a liability for Malawi. The contesting spaces in the understandings, as expressed by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teacher, and faith-community leaders, negated or minimised the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

The term weakness is used here to denote the dual-mode RE curriculum's perceived lack of potential to benefit Malawi - the curriculum's perceived threats or negative value. It is claimed that the contesting spaces in the understandings reflected different perceived weaknesses of the curriculum policy change, though with variations in areas of emphasis. Such differences were a reflection of politics of the school curriculum in terms of how and why the policy was interpreted. Thus, different research participants perceived varied weaknesses in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, depending on their ideological concerns. Through such variations, disagreements about the curriculum as a liability for Malawi were manifested. The study argues that the contesting spaces negating or minimising the value of the policy change were a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

In the next section, I present and discuss the understandings portraying value of the policy change in terms of threats for Malawi. The argument is that the weaknesses or threats negate the policy's value.

7.2   Understandings Negating the Value of the Dual-Mode   Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change

For an empathic and thick description of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, a thematic approach has been adopted, as was the case in Chapter Six. Under each theme the voice of each category of the research participants is heard separately. The intended effect of such an approach is to enable comparisons, contrast, analysis and insight (Stengel & Tom, 2006). The discussion begins with the category of Ministry of Education officials.

7.2.1   The Voice of Ministry of Education Officials[82]

Within this subsection, four themes are discussed, representing the voice of The Ministry of Education officials and reflecting contesting spaces regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. The first theme negates the value of policy change for lack of adequate preparation prior to implementation. The second theme minimises the policy's value due to the difficulty faced in getting the policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice. The third theme negates the policy on the premise of the timing of its implementation while the fourth theme minimises the value of the policy on the basis of the optional status of the curriculum.

The next subsection discusses lack of adequate preparation as weakness of the policy change.

7.2.1.1 Lack of Adequate Preparation Prior to Curriculum Implementation

Under this theme, it is argued that some of the contesting spaces in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials negated the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change on the premise that there was lack of adequate preparation prior to

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[82] I remind the reader of the use of abbreviations for the respective categories of the research participants as MOE, HT and FC, as used in Chapter Six.

curriculum implementation. The essence of the negation was that the policy was introduced without adequate preparation, which adversely affected its implementation in schools. Training, orientation, and sensitisation of teachers were not done. In addition, there was inadequate provision of teaching and learning materials. Even the community at large was not sensitised about the policy change.

One nuanced understanding was that the policy change was a political imposition. As a result of that, little attention was paid to adequate preparation before the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced in schools. From that perspective, the policy was understood as a product of political pressure, aimed at accommodating the interests of the political leadership of the time, which was, then, headed by a Muslim president. Thus, due to political pressure, the curriculum was introduced although there was no adequate preparation. One adverse effect was that the policy change got resistance from schools, in particular, and the community, in general. That resistance was inevitable given the lack of preparation. The study argues that the tendency by many schools to prefer the mono-faith syllabus of BK to the dual-mode RE curriculum (BK and RME) was a form of resistance. This resonates with Fullan's (2007) observation that unless people share the meaning of educational change, its implementation is likely to be contested. Sensitisation of stakeholders is one way of enhancing shared meaning. This was pointed out as one weakness associated with the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Commenting on lack of adequate sensitisation of stakeholders, one Ministry of Education official (MOE-1 stated:

There wasn't much sensitisation. It came in as something imposed sort of. Although curriculum change ought to begin with sensitisation,… not much of sensitisation was done such that when this thing was being introduced, to some it came as a surprise while those who might have gotten wind of it…knew what was coming. But most people inside…didn't know much. And that's why in some areas, sectors, or in some schools, there was some kind of resistance, say…those schools which are faith-based. They sort of resisted this introduction of RME because they didn't really know what it was all about (Interview, MOE-1).

In addition to lack of sensitisation of stakeholders, another understanding minimised the curriculum's value due to shortage of teaching materials. MOE-6 commented:

Unfortunately we did not sensitise stakeholders on the introduction of the new curriculum. …Of course plans were there to sensitise teachers or to conduct INSETs [In-service trainings] about this new curriculum but then that was not done. And because of that, a lot of…stakeholders like teachers and learners were not all that receptive [to] the introduction of the new curriculum. And because of that, a good number of schools opted for BK instead of Religious and Moral Studies; partly because they were not prepared to accept the Religious and Moral Studies. Secondly, there was also another problem of shortage of teaching materials. So because of that most schools opted for Bible Knowledge (Interview, MOE-6).

The impression given here was that lack of sensitisation led to curriculum contestation. Thus, the curriculum did not have the reception it should have got had there been adequate preparation in terms of sensitising stakeholders. This view illuminates sensitisation as one crucial aspect of educational policy formulation and implementation. It has a bearing on the politics of the school curriculum in terms of how stakeholders receive the curriculum change.

Other understandings, by some Ministry of Education officials, negated the policy change because of the difficulties schools were facing in implementing RME compared to BK. The claim was that the difficulties were a consequence of lack of adequate preparation, as described by MOE-4:

We introduced the subject without orienting the teachers. They were forced to start yet they did not have enough… knowledge on how to approach the subject matter… I hope you are aware that in Malawi we have actually produced teachers who are competent to teach Bible Knowledge. But I don't think at any time we, as Ministry, produced teachers who are conversant with Moral and Religious Studies. So, most of the times they were depending on extensive… reading. I think that's one of the…reasons why there is a backward movement (Interview, MOE-4).

The backward movement referred to here was the non-implementation of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Schools preferred the old syllabus of BK to the new syllabus of RME. MOE-4 continued to comment that:

…unfortunately, the teachers who were supposed to handle or teach this subject were not actually oriented. So, that's one of the reasons why there is now a backward move, that concentration is put on now Bible Knowledge…I think people received it with mixed reactions. That's why we see that schools are not offering Religious and Moral [Education]. They are still opting for BK. They are resisting the change (MOE-4).

Similar sentiments were expressed by MOE-3 as follows:

…because a normal change starts with the preparation of materials, training of people; but teachers were not trained, the officers not trained, materials not available up to this time. That is why [RME] is not taught in schools. It was just drastic. It was rather a directive from above whereby the Ministry of Education wouldn't have done anything (Interview, MOE-3).

Minimising the value the policy change due to lack of preparation, MOE-8 commented that:

There was no preparation in the sense that…teachers were not prepared - were not trained to teach [Religious and Moral Education] as opposed to Bible Knowledge. As such, it was not a very welcome [policy change]. The Ministry did not have materials in place – the teaching and learning materials in place. …as I am speaking now, I have to be convinced that there is any preparation on [Religious and Moral Education]. When you look at the examination results charts – computer outputs – I don't see Religious and Moral Education] there, which means, if at all it is being taught, it is very little on the ground. But there is BK. The Bible is still there as much as it used to be (Interview, MOE-8).

Another negation was expressed by MOE-2 as follows:

There wasn't much preparation to start with… it was only in the core subjects where an orientation was conducted. That's subjects like English, Mathematics…Social and Development Studies, and Life Skills. It didn't take into account other elective subjects like Bible Knowledge and Religious and Moral Education; so that there wasn't much of preparation that was done (Interview, MOE-2).

The above views about an apparent policy non-implementation was corroborated by some statistical evidence on what the head teachers said about the decisions secondary schools were making in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum.[83] Many schools continued offering BK only as was the case before the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Lack of adequate preparation was understood as a cause of resistance to the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Another understanding negated the policy change because of lack of materials. For instance, MOE-8 expressed that:

There are no materials worth mentioning to say the [RME] is taught from these materials or learned from these materials. …the people …have not received this as a welcome

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[83] See Appendix 8: Table A8. 5

*change. It has been negative or things have been forced. In some quarters there is no
mention of [RME] in our institutions (Interview, MOE-8).*

This view on lack of teaching materials was supported by statistics on what secondary
school head teachers said about books received from the Ministry of Education. For
instance, out of 53 head teachers, 35 (66%) said they had not received any books for the
dual-mode RE curriculum while only 18 (34%) said they had received books.[84]

However, MOE-5, at one education division, acknowledged that some sensitisation was
done with respect to teachers but not with the community in general, as evident in the
following comments:

*Yes…talking about preparations for these [BK and RME], what I know at the moment is
that the only sensitisation meetings that we have conducted so far…targeted our teachers
so that they should know the content, especially Religious and Moral Education. We
had…development of materials and these teachers were then trained so that they could
know what these materials had to offer and how they could handle the material in class.
But beyond that, I have really little knowledge as to what the Ministry has done to
sensitise the community (Interview, MOE-5).*

All in all, lack of adequate preparation for curriculum implementation, by The Ministry
of Education, was expressed as one of the factors minimising the value of the dual-mode
RE curriculum policy change. As a result, many schools preferred BK to RME. That
preference can be seen as a contesting space in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy
change. The contestation was due to lack of adequate preparation of teachers, especially
with regard to the teaching of RME as a new discursive space in the school curriculum.
Most teachers and schools were sufficiently ready to teach BK because the teachers had
some teaching training or experience of the subject unlike RME. BK had been in the
school curriculum for a long time while RME was new.

The next sub-section discusses the difficulty of getting the dual-mode RE curriculum
policy change into practice as one its threats.

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[84]See Appendix 8: Table A8.14

7.2.1.2   Difficulty of Getting Policy Change beyond Bureaucracy into Practice

Other contesting spaces, in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials, expressed the difficulty of getting the policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice at school level. Lack of financial and teaching resources was one of the constraints and challenges negating the policy change. MOE-7 observed that:

…it should be understood that a school can choose either or offer both. But now you know economic constraints, the school would not manage to buy books for BK, books for RME. If that was possible, possibly they would offer both. …and also the issue of staff because RME is not as simple as we think, it demands also a bit of knowledge about Islam, a bit of knowledge about ATR [African Traditional Religion], the sociology of these other religions whilst BK may…require somebody just to have… knowledge of the Christian world and the Biblical world without too much comparison of other religions. So…preparation of staff matters when schools are choosing between [BK and RME] (Interview, MOE-7).

The above view acknowledged that the policy was introduced against a background of lack of qualified teachers, especially for RME. If this was true, one can ask why the Ministry of Education decided to introduce the multi-faith syllabus before getting qualified teachers ready to teach the subject. Anecdotal evidence suggests that from the mid 1980s, at the University of Malawi, student-teachers were trained to teach the three religions: Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (Phiri, 2009). So, one speculation could be teachers' willingness to teach multi-faith RE maybe because of their Christian faith convictions or because they were used to teaching BK. Another speculation could be the issue of politics of the politics of the school curriculum. The argument here is that curriculum policy change may be formulated and implemented on the basis of considerations other than educational. Apparently, the policy was introduced as a political strategy to accommodate the competing demands for RE by the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. The political need to maintain peace and unity among the faith-communities overshadowed the reality that there were no enough, ready and qualified teachers for the dual-mode RE curriculum. Another possible reason could be that The Ministry of Education had assumed that BK teachers could implement the dual-mode RE curriculum even in the absence of orientation or retraining.

Another understanding portrayed the policy change as a threat because of additional
pressure exerted on the school curriculum. That was compounded by teachers' lack of
competence to implement the dual-mode RE curriculum. In this regard, MOE-1 stated:

*But again, the other problem was to do with, in our [Education] Division especially,
timetabling. Because it was like the new curriculum, there were a lot of subjects. So
teachers saw RME as an additional subject and to fit it on the timetable which is already
packed with these other subjects, then they saw that to them whichever was simpler was
actually advocated. We don't force it on the teachers to say whether you like it or not you
do this, no. They are at liberty, because RME and BK, they are optional subjects. ... So
schools are free to offer it or not (Interview, MOE-1).*

Similar sentiments were expressed by MOE-6:

*...from the schools we have visited, a good number of teachers are saying they are
willing to teach the subject but they don't have the technical know-how to teach the
subject. So it is difficult to force somebody to teach a subject which he doesn't know how
to handle. And even learners, they are afraid to take this subject because they know: 1.
they don't have enough materials for the subject, 2. the government don't have competent
teachers to handle the subject. So, that it would be a risk to take this Religious and Moral
Education. As a result, most of them are opting for BK because the materials are readily
available and there are teachers for BK – well-trained teachers for BK (Interview, MOE-
6).*

Lack of resources was, therefore, expressed as one factor negating the curriculum's
effective implementation. To that extent, the policy change was perceived as a weakness
by schools. One point to be noted here is that the dual-mode RE curriculum was negated
because of the challenges besetting the process of getting the policy change beyond
bureaucracy into practice at school level. As observed by Darling-Hammond (1998),
whilst policy change is inevitable for any society, it is difficult to get the proposed policy
change beyond bureaucracy into practice. As such, it is possible for policy change to
remain at the policy-making level, without translating into practice.

Furthermore, RME, as a parallel syllabus to BK, was understood by some Ministry of
Education officials, as increasing pressure on the school timetable. In a sense, the
introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum increased the number of subjects in the
school curriculum. BK and RME had to be accommodated, creating the need for more
resources in terms of competent teachers, teaching materials, and timetable space. As a
result of these challenges, many schools tended to prefer BK to RME, leading to

curriculum implementation variations. One point to be noted here is that the existence of such variations resonates with the observation that implementation of policy provisions will be afforded varying degrees of attention according to the implementer's understanding of the immediacy, practicality, and knowledge of each policy provision (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997).

The next sub-section discusses the timing of the introduction of the policy change as a threat.

7.2.1.3   Timing Negating Reception of Curriculum Policy Change

Under this theme, the study argues that some contesting spaces, in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials, negated or minimised the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum on the premise that the timing of the policy change caused mixed reactions and tension among people. The policy change was perceived as a threat in the sense that it created mixed feelings. There was an apparent awareness, in the understandings that although in some sense the policy was considered as having created some opportunities for Malawi, it was, to some extent, a negative change. Because of such mixed reactions, effective curriculum implementation was not possible. That situation served to negate or minimise the policy's value. This understanding seemed to be informed by the desire to get policy change beyond bureaucracy. The claim here was that as policy-makers, it was difficult to get the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change accepted in society because it had been politicised, leading to mixed reactions.

Commenting on the mixed reactions, MOE-2 stated:

In fact it depended or it depends on where you belong to, if say for example you are a Muslim and then with the introduction of Religious and Moral Education, where the teaching of Islam was included, those people were happy. They thought probably their wishes, you know, were considered. But those that were coming from the Christian background, they thought that probably that was an attempt to convert some Christians. ...but there was misunderstanding, a lot of misunderstandings, especially from those people that did not know why the change. They thought that...the government was trying to convert people through education (Interview, MOE-2).

MOE-5 concurred that there had been mixed reactions to the policy change as follows:

There are really mixed reactions from the community and hence…the fuss that was there in the community. In fact the community even up to now is still not too sure of what really is the way forward to this new approach. …But I should believe that probably any new change is subject to be resisted up until the whole community would really understand how it was…prepared. But right now may be the problem that I can see here is that the community was not involved in the initiation stages of this new approach. It is like we as curriculum developers just came up with the idea and developed the material. Then later on we thought of sensitising the community when the material was already there. So that's why may be this really brought… an uproar from the society (Interview, MOE-5).

MOE-9's comments below highlight some community resistance:

… whenever you are bringing change there are some quarters of the society that will resist. And with this one, there is a very good percentage of people resisting it. For instance, when we had Bible Knowledge only, the Muslim students…some of them were willing to take the subject and were writing examinations. But when it came to this RME, the Christians…refuted it completely such that the candidates that write the exams, probably we can say not much – not many of them are Christians (Interview, MOE-9).

An insight here is that mixed reactions were created because some people understood the curriculum as a means for conversion. The inclusion of Islam in the multi-faith syllabus was perceived as an attempt to convert people to Islam. It is interesting to interrogate why the RME syllabus was suspected to be a means for conversion. If anything, people should have been suspicious of BK because of its mono-faith approach. Probably this misunderstanding was a cover-up for hegemony by people resisting the introduction of Islam and other religions in the school curriculum. For a long time, in the history of education in Malawi, RE was based on the Christian faith. With that background, the introduction of other religions in the RE curriculum could easily be understood as an attack on the hegemony enjoyed by the Christian faith.

Another insight is that, in the context of these mixed reactions, schools tended to prefer BK to RME. Such preference might reflect a contesting space in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change and, therefore, politics of the school curriculum.

Commenting on the apparent contestation of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change MOE-3 observed that:

Of course schools have made it open. They have made [both] subjects available. But practically, to a greater extent, most opt for Bible Knowledge for obvious reasons. I think

because of their religious inclinations, most opt for Bible Knowledge. Of course there are cases here and there where you have students learning Religious and Moral Education, but they are very rare…To a greater extent, it is still Bible Knowledge which seems to be taking an upper hand (Interview, MOE-3).

MOE-7 also minimised the policy's value due to the apparent contestation at school level as follows:

The only visible thing is that Christian schools are choosing BK and where there are predominantly…Islamic communities they are choosing RME because of the component of Islam. So probably that can tell the reaction that the other community doesn't want their students to learn the… philosophies of the other religions. … In secondary schools, the reaction is just choice of subjects: Christian schools choosing BK without consultation, without remorse (Interview, MOE-7).

The cause of the policy's mixed reactions was explained by MOE-1:

It is really viewed with mixed reactions. One thing for sure is that the two [BK and RME], since they are dealing with issues to do with faith and especially for the young people, the worry with the society is, if we begin offering RME which taps issues from different faiths…aren't we in one way going to convert the young ones at that level? Won't they be confused at that level to say they are learning about these things from this faith, that faith, that faith?...So the worry with society is…the young people might get confused because every faith would want its young generation to really know or learn about things from their own faith (Interview, MOE-1).

One insight from the above understanding is that there was lack of clarity about the educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The mixed reactions reflected lack of understanding about what the curriculum sought to achieve in terms of education. Underpinning these mixed reactions could be the conflict between ideologies about confessional and non-confessional RE; a conflict between promoting faith, on the one hand, and critical understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life, on the other.

This ideological conflict was supported by some statistics on what the head teachers said about the influence of parents or faith-communities on the implementation of the dual-mode RE curriculum. For instance, out of 51 head teachers, 36 (70%) said the Christians supported BK, as mono-faith RE, while Muslims supported RME, as multi-faith RE.[85]

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[85] See Appendix 8: Table A8. 7

Apparently, the policy was misunderstood in that BK was taken to be for Christians and RME for Muslims. To that extent, the policy had created what Summers (1996, p. 11) describes as "religious apartheid" in schools. However, the policy only stipulated that both BK and RME should be offered in schools as optional subjects not that BK is for Christians and RME is for Muslims. One obvious point here was that the curriculum policy change was subject to various interpretations.

It was also surprising and somehow misleading that the RME syllabus was taken to be for Muslims, yet it covers the three main religious traditions of Malawi, namely, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (Ministry of Education, 1998). As discussed in Chapter Two, such a misunderstanding could be due to the apparent conflict in the conception of RE. For instance, The Ministry of Education conceptualised RE as an educational activity while the Christian faith-communities conceptualised it as religious activity. In that sense the mixed reactions reflected the tension between the secular (educational) and sacred (religious) understanding of RE.[86] One point to be noted here is that unless such ideological conflict is resolved, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change will continue to be contested by various groups speaking at cross-purposes.

The next sub-section discusses the optional status of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy as one of its weaknesses.

7.2.1.4 Curriculum Optionality Negating Policy Implementation

Other contesting spaces in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials tended to negate the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum because of its optional status. The variations in curriculum implementation at school level were understood as a consequence of the curriculum's optional status. Thus, the curriculum optionality was understood differently from one school to another, resulting in curriculum implementation variations. The policy stipulated that schools should offer both BK and RME as optional subject for learners to choose one to study. However, this was not the meaning that the curriculum carried for different schools in Malawi. The principle of

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[86] This is discussed in Chapter Three

offering the curriculum as optional was understood differently, negating or minimising its intended value for Malawi.

For instance, some schools understood optionality as implying that schools had the freedom to choose either BK or RME. Other schools understood it as implying that schools could offer both BK and RME as electives. Another understanding was that schools could choose to implement the dual-mode RE curriculum policy or not. These differences resulted in variations in the way the curriculum was being implemented in schools.

Commenting on curriculum implementation variations at school level, MOE-1 stated that:

When we go round schools, we see that there are variations from one school to another. … not all schools are doing the same thing. Most schools are still … implementing Bible Knowledge while those which got orientation really they introduced the Religious and Moral Education. But the worry …still boils down to the lack of sensitisation because …there was sort of diversified understanding in terms of why RME, to most people. So, in most schools…they didn't see much reason to really offer RME… So schools were at liberty and most teachers having gone through Bible Knowledge curriculum themselves, they saw that going for BK was to them simpler than tackling a new thing altogether which would mean a lot of reading on their part, a lot of preparation… While some really…started well but then along the way they stopped and then reverted to BK having seen that's where they are more comfortable (Interview, MOE-1).

It can be argued here that the above understanding was informed by the historical background of RE in Malawi. Since the beginning of formal western education in the 1870s, RE had been based on the mono-faith approach. At secondary level, BK had been offered since independence in 1964. The RE teachers had themselves been exposed to the BK syllabus during their time as students. Thus, in the absence of retraining or orientation, most teachers tended to prefer BK to RME.

On the implementation variations MOE-5 commented that:

It seems really that in our division, for secondary schools only, most schools are not offering Religious and Moral Education. Most schools are only offering Bible Knowledge. And the reason I am giving is the same: that it is pressure from the community. They even instruct their children to say you have to learn Bible Knowledge [and not RME]. Secondly, the teachers themselves most of them do not have the

knowledge to offer Religious and Moral Education. But again the other problem is that much as we have sensitised these teachers, but the reading culture again in our teachers is not there. Because they might have the knowledge to say this is how you would approach [the subject], with books there, but if they don't want to read then there is nothing that they can offer (Interview, MOE-5).

Furthermore, the role of the teachers of RME as a contributory cause to poor implementation is described by MOE-2:

I can say partly it is being implemented. Why partly? … we still have a problem in our schools that even the teachers themselves, others are not comfortable with Religious and Moral Education. May be it's the mode of training; others are comfortable with the same Bible Knowledge. So you find that… more schools are still offering Bible Knowledge; and there are few schools which are offering Religious and Moral Education. So it's partly being implemented (Interview, MOE-2).

Another understanding negated the dual-mode RE curriculum's value because of a clear preference for BK to RME by many schools. MOE-4 observed that:

I think people received [the dual-mode RE curriculum] with mixed reactions. That's why we see that schools are not offering Religious and Moral [Education]. They are still opting for BK. They are resisting the change (Interview, MOE-4).

Similarly, MOE-6 also stated:

Through our visits to schools, we have seen that a good number of schools are not implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum. Most of them are opting for Bible Knowledge. They are used to Bible Knowledge; they have got materials for Bible Knowledge (Interview, MOE-6)…

I think we can attribute that first to lack of resources and then secondly lack of teachers, especially in the community day secondary schools[87], who have got no teachers who can adequately handle Religious and Moral [Education] (Interview, MOE-6).

Thus, as observed by Ball (1994) and Odden (1991), policy carries different meanings for different players as it moves from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice. The implementation variations could be understood from this perspective.

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[87] Community-day secondary schools (CDSSs) are a category of public schools in Malawi built by the community with help from government or donor agencies, serving learners from the immediate community surrounding the school. They are, however, funded by government for their operations. This category of schools originally started as centers for distance learning. Many of these schools are low-resourced and found in rural areas of Malawi.

Another insight could be that the variations serve to indicate that educational policies do not reach schools exactly as envisaged by policy-makers. Here Buenfil-Burgos (2000, p. 1) observes that although:

> …educational policies …do not reach schools and other educational environments exactly as they were proposed, they nevertheless leave a trace in day to day local educational practices.

Thus, the variations could be a reflection of the traces of the dual-mode curriculum policy change in schools as well as contesting spaces in curriculum policy change. In a sense, the variations could also resonate with Darling-Hammond's (1999) notion that whilst policy change is inevitable for any society, it is difficult to bring the intended change beyond bureaucracy. Furthermore, they could reflect that curriculum is a hotly contested space (Apple, 2004; Glatthorn et al., 2006; Kelly, 1999). The claim here is that such variations and contestation are a reflection of politics of the school curriculum whereby different people understand a curriculum according to their different ideologies.

The next section discusses the findings as the voice of the head teachers, portraying the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum for Malawi.

7.2.1   The Voice of Secondary School Head Teachers

Under this subsection, the research findings, as the voice of secondary school head teachers, are discussed, under four themes. The themes portray the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy for Malawi from the perspective of secondary school head teachers. The first theme negates the policy change for its hasty introduction while the second for increasing problems for schools. The third theme minimises the value of the policy because it was introduced under political pressure and the fourth because of lack of curriculum implementation support.

Hasty curriculum introduction is discussed in the next subsection.

7.2.2.1   Hasty Introduction Negating Curriculum Policy Change

Some contesting spaces in the understandings by secondary school head teachers negated the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change on the premise that it was

hastily introduced. More specifically, the introduction of RME alongside BK was done without the necessary preparation for its effective implementation at school level. The policy was introduced against a backdrop of BK monopoly of the RE curriculum space in public schools. Since BK had been in the school curriculum for a long time, schools had some competent teachers and required teaching and learning resources for BK only when the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was introduced in 2001. On the other hand, RME was introduced without a relatively comparable fund of resources, making schools' resistance to the policy change inevitable.

For instance, on the policy's hasty introduction one head teacher (HT-19) stated:

The introduction of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in the [curriculum] was done in a hurry. It appears to me that there was no wide consultation before it was introduced. That was the reason it was met with a lot of resistance, especially in mission schools (Questionnaire, HT-19).

In some cases, contesting spaces by some head teachers negated the dual-mode RE curriculum on the grounds that there was no consultation as well as burdening pupils with so many subjects, as HT-37 observed that:

The inclusion of RME in the subjects to be taught in schools was done in haste. There was no country-wide consultation; classroom managers were not fully consulted. If anything, it was only the top brass at the Ministry or curriculum specialists only. In addition, students / pupils are already burdened with so many subjects. No wonder the schools that are offering RME are just too few to count, needless to mention Christian secondary schools (Questionnaire, HT-37).

One insight here is that teaching RME besides BK was perceived to have increased the workload of schools. Offering two RE syllabuses at the same time was understood as an over-burden to schools and one of the factors contributing to contestation.

Negating the policy because of lack of orientation of RE teachers and head teachers, HT-15 stated that:

There was also poor orientation. Teachers and head teachers were not well oriented on the subject. Those teachers who qualified before the introduction of RME are not comfortable with it so they prefer BK to RME. In schools mostly run by Catholics or CCAP [Church of Central Africa Presbyterian] ...the introduction of RME was in conflict with the main aim of the mission to Malawi. They were aiming at the three Rs,

read, write and religion. So it was as if the government was moving away from their main idea of educating Christians to read the Bible (Questionnaire, HT-15).

The above view on lack of orientation of teachers was corroborated by statistics on what head teachers said about in-service training for RE teachers. For instance, all 51 (100%) head teachers who answered the question said that teachers in their schools had not yet received any in-service training, as a way of supporting them in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum.[88]

Thus, the curriculum was not given adequate support for it to register effective implementation at school level. This may help to shade some light on why many head teachers said their schools were offering BK only. Schools had at least resources for BK since it had been taught in the schools for a long time and had some experienced teachers. Furthermore, many of the teachers had studied BK during their secondary school education. As such, they were likely to be more comfortable with BK than RME.

On teaching and learning resources statistics also reflected inadequacy of textbooks, especially for RME. For instance, out of 53 head teachers, 35 (66%) said their schools had not received any books for implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum. Only 18 (34%) head teachers said they had received books from The Ministry of Education.[89] Textbooks are an important factor to support any effective curriculum implementation. As such, it was inevitable that lack of textbooks was perceived one of the possible causes of the apparent non-implementation of the policy change in some schools.

Another contesting space negated the dual-mode RE curriculum policy on the premise of its hasty introduction, without needs assessment and consultation with stakeholders, as described by HT-23:

It was hastily done, in that the curriculum planners did not make adequate consultations and research. The people involved in the dual-mode RE curriculum were not sufficiently consulted for example teachers, parents and religious leaders just to mention a few. As a result the opposition was fuelled from the schools [and] religious groups (Questionnaire, HT-23).

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[88]See Appendix 8: Table A8: 16
[89] See Appendix 8: Table A8.14

Expressing similar sentiments, HT-26 stated:

The idea is a good move however the manner it was introduced in schools left a lot to be desired. There wasn't much orientation and sensitisation with stakeholders in the education sector vis-à-vis the "assault troops" who are the implementers of the curriculum "the teachers" (Questionnaire, HT-26).

The effects of the lack of orientation and teaching resources were also evident in the comments of HT-36:

It is undisputable that the inclusion of the RME in the curriculum has totally flopped. There are approximately less than five percent of the schools in Malawi offering RME. This is as such because of lack of adequate sensitisation and orientation of the subject to the concerned teachers by the Ministry of education (MOE). RME as a subject needs several books. The texts were therefore not made available for teachers (Questionnaire, HT-36).

A similar remark was made by HT-43:

Most teachers were trained to teach BK only. So it is unrealistic to expect them to teach both BK and RME, yet they have had no orientation on the RME syllabus (Questionnaire, HT-43).

Views on shortage of qualified RE teachers were corroborated by statistics about what head teachers said about the availability of teachers. Out of 51 head teachers, 31 (61%) said that they had sufficient teachers for BK only while 13 (25%)) said that they had sufficient teachers for both BK and RME.[90]

One insight from the above discussion is that low school staffing-level affects the way in which any curriculum policy is implemented. The preparedness of teachers is also crucial for an effective implementation of any curriculum change. The claim here was that the apparent unpopularity of the policy change was a consequence of low staffing-level and teachers' lack of preparedness. This may shed some light on why many of the head teachers stated that their schools were offering BK only.

The next sub-section discusses how the policy change was understood as a threat by increasing problems for schools according to the perspectives of the head teachers.

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[90] As presented in Appendix 8:Table A8.6

7.2.2.2   Curriculum Policy Change Increasing Problems for Schools

This subsection argues that another salient contesting space in the understanding by the head teachers, as leaders in making curriculum decisions and choices at school level, was that the policy change had created more problems for schools. The policy's implementation challenges had increased the problems besetting Malawi' education system. To that extent, the policy was understood as a recipe for confusion, affecting schools' operations. Unlike The Ministry of Education officials, the main concern by the head teachers was on the practical difficulties for schools created by the curriculum. Operationalising the policy change was problematic in the context of challenges schools were already facing. The impact of the policy on learners was also a matter of concern.

For instance, describing the policy as a source of additional problems for schools, HT-15 stated:

This change has brought many problems in schools. There is creation of many subjects to be offered in secondary schools. This brings the problem of human resources and materials. Another challenge is that pupils feel that BK is for Christians whereas RME is for Moslems [sic]. So where BK is offered, Moslem students drop it because they think that it's meant for converting them to Christianity. The introduction of RME came as a replacement of BK, this invited resistance from the Christianity sector. It was thought that RME is there to wipe away Christianity (Questionnaire, HT-15).

HT-3 also negated the curriculum on the grounds that it had created pressure on school resources:

I feel there was no wisdom in introducing RME beside BK thereby putting pressure on the already inadequate staff and resources. I feel that, the best would have been fusing the two into one syllabus just as what colleges are doing i.e. Theology and Religious Studies are one subject (Questionnaire, HT-3).

Furthermore, HT-42 minimised the curriculum's value on the premise that RME had contributed to congestion on the school timetable. This view was expressed as follows:

The introduction of RME in Malawi school curriculum is a positive move. However, the crowded subjects that we have today in secondary schools make it very difficult to comfortably include RME also on the already overcrowded and overburdened timetables (Questionnaire, HT-42).

One point to note here is that the policy's value was negated for several issues. Firstly, the curriculum was perceived as contributing to timetable congestion for schools. Instead of offering one RE syllabus, schools had to offer two: BK and RME. Secondly, the curriculum was understood as exacerbating the problem of teacher-shortage. Schools had to find teachers for the two RE syllabi. Thirdly, the curriculum was also perceived as contributing to the struggle for power or domination between the faith-communities, more specifically between the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. The struggle for power was reflected in the suspicion that the RME syllabus was intended to wipe away Christianity.

However, this suspicion is questionable given that, as a multi-faith syllabus, RME includes Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions. One could argue that the suspicion reflected the Christian faith-communities' reluctance to let go the hegemony of the Christian faith in the RE curriculum. The inclusion of other religions in the curriculum space, which had been the monopoly of the Christian faith, was against that hegemony.

A case of power struggle can be noted here in connection with the introduction of other faiths in the multi-faith syllabus. The Christian faith-communities contested the syllabus and understood it as an attempt "to wipe away Christianity" (Questionnaire, HT-15). In this case, the policy change was in conflict with the ideology of the Christian faith-communities. Their conception of RE was informed by the need to promote faith. To that extent, the RE curriculum was turned into a "battleground of many competing influences and ideologies" (Kelly, 1999, p. 167). Such contestation, coupled with inadequate preparation of teachers, worked to negate the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Another contesting space negated the policy as a recipe for confusion. For instance, HT-9 observed that:

The change will bring confusion in this country. Only BK should be taught. RME suited the previous regime for the reason best known to the leaders (Questionnaire, HT-9).

Commenting on the policy's divisive effect on Christians and Muslims in public schools, one head teacher (HT-5) had this to say:

While I may not be comfortably and competently aware about the rationale of introducing this, in reality it has, to some extent, polarized the schools according to faiths. Those perceived to be predominantly in Christian domains have emphasised on [BK] while those in Moslem [sic] regions opting for RME. Even teachers in these areas are inclined to these perceptions similarly (Questionnaire, HT-5).

One insight from the above views could be that the policy change was a liability for Malawi's education system because it had polarised schools into those that favoured BK and those that favoured RME. Such polarisation defeated government's purpose of aligning the curriculum to the political vision of maintaining peace and unity among people (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). It had the effect of creating religious apartheid among schools (Summers, 1996).

However, one point to note here is that since RME covers Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, it is not correct to claim that it is for Muslims. In fact, it is BK that privileges the Christian faith-communities, as it is only based on the Bible as the scripture for Christianity. The Christian faith-communities' resistance of RME reflected their unwillingness to have other religions included in the school curriculum. Ideologically, such resistance could be influenced by what D' Costa (1986) describes as an exclusivist theology of other religions.[91]

Furthermore, other contesting spaces in the understandings by the head teachers portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an inconvenience to learners. It was doing learners more harm than good. To that extent, the policy was a threat for Malawi's national education system. HT-44 described:

Furthermore, the RME syllabus has so far been operating at JC level [Junior Certificate level – forms one to two] because there is no syllabus for MSCE level [Malawi School Certificate Examination level – forms three to four]. It is therefore difficult for students to take this subject. Those who take it find that they cannot continue with it at MSCE level. It is for that reason that I feel most schools are not offering this subject although the policy stipulates that schools should teach both BK and RME. The change was mainly

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[91] See Chapters Four and Eight

meant to pacify Muslims and Christians with little regard to its effects on implementation (Questionnaire, HT-44).

Expressing similar sentiments, HT-22 commented that:

Personally I feel the change brought in more harm than good. To begin with, students have been inconvenienced especially [those] who were studying RME at JCE level. At MSCE these students were always stranded since RME only ended at JCE level as it was difficult [for them] to start BK at MSCE level (Questionnaire, HT-22).

HT-52 also negated the policy as follows:

While I appreciate the change, I tend to disagree on offering the subjects as alternatives. That is one should choose either BK or RME. This is making it difficult for the young generation in secondary schools to know and understand other people's religions and therefore tolerate. In schools that opt for BK in order to defend their religion, for example, the Seventh Day Adventist Church can hardly allow their [students] learn other people's religions. To them it's a dilution of standards of their religious beliefs. Of course other religions do also [fall] under this category (Questionnaire, HT-52).

Lack of continuity for RME from junior to senior secondary school level was one of the factors perceived to negate the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Learners opting for RME since 2001 had not had the opportunity to continue with the subject at senior secondary level. This discontinuity was there due to the fact that The Ministry of Education did not go ahead to develop the RME syllabus for the senior secondary level after the Christian faith-communities had resisted its introduction in the year 2000. Thus, although the RME controversy was resolved by the introduction of the dual-mode curriculum policy in 2001, The Ministry of Education has not yet introduced the RME at senior secondary school level (up to the time of writing this thesis). Its implementation was at junior certificate level only.

One point to note here is that two options have so far been available for such learners. Firstly, they can take BK if they wish to study RE at senior secondary level. This option does not work to their advantage since they study RME at junior secondary level. Secondly, learners have to drop RE at senior secondary level. To that extent, the policy can be perceived as doing learners more harm than good.

Another insight was that the policy was negated for its failure to create space for religious tolerance in the school curriculum. As optional subjects, BK and RME promote different aims of education. BK has the potential to promote exclusivist values whilst the multi-faith approach of RME can promote inclusivist and/or pluralist values. Such differences create ambiguity about the theory of education underpinning the dual-mode RE curriculum. To that extent, its potential to promote civil toleration of differences among learners is minimised.

Furthermore, the fact that few schools offer RME compared to BK could be a consequence of lack continuity of the RME. Learners do not have the opportunity of studying it further at senior secondary school level.

The next subsection discusses political pressure as one of the threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

7.2.2.3   Curriculum Policy Change Introduced under Political Pressure

Some contesting spaces in the understandings by the head teachers negated the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change on the premise that it was a political move to turn Malawi into an Islamic country. This view was largely framed within Malawi's historical and socio-political context. The policy change was introduced when Malawi was under a Muslim president for the first time. Such a policy change was, therefore, understood in some quarters as a means to Islamise Malawi (turn Malawi into an Islamic country).

HT-26) negated the policy on the grounds that its introduction was politicised, as follows:

It appears that the whole issue of introduction of RME was in a way politicised. It came at a time when rumours had it that the leadership of the time wanted to islamise the country. As a result most people resisted and are still resisting the change (Questionnaire, HT-26).

I wish to argue here that attributing the introduction of RME to a Muslim president could be a historical misrepresentation of the change from a mono-faith to a multi-faith approach in Malawi. That change had started in primary school teacher training colleges in 1987 and in primary schools in 1991. In both cases the multi-faith curriculum covered

Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions, and issues of moral education. The change had started when Malawi was under one-party rule with a Christian president. So, the introduction of the multi-faith curriculum in secondary schools in 2000 was just an extension and culmination of the curricular initiative that had already been in motion since the late 1980s. Given that background, it can be argued that the resistance to the multi-faith curriculum was just a mere reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

Another contesting space reflected the hegemony of Christianity over other religions in Malawi. HT-22 commented that:

Malawi as a nation is dominated by Christians and as such it is useless to bother people to study other religions which may have nothing to do with their spiritual life. Of course gaining the knowledge itself seems to be advantageous but why should I know something which is of no use to me?

...the introduction of RME came at a wrong period when the leadership of the country was under a Muslim and this brought in a feeling to the majority that it was a move towards Islamising the nation and for this reason RME never brought the expected tolerance among people of different faiths. And instead many have started questioning the credibility and the introduction of the subjects [BK and RME as parallel subjects] (Questionnaire, HT-22).

The above understanding brought to the fore two critical issues regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Firstly, it reflected lack of clarity about the rationale of the policy change. In the case of the above head teacher (HT-22), the curriculum was understood as a religious activity aimed at promoting the spiritual values among the learners. Yet RE has to be conceptualised as an educational activity for it to be justified like any other subject in the school curriculum. Thus an ideological conflict was at play here between RE as a religious and educational activity. Secondly, the shift from mono-faith to multi-faith RE was taken out of its historical context, by associating its origin with a Muslim presidency (1994 -2004). In reality the shift had started in the late 1980s when Malawi was under a Christian presidency (1964-1994). This historical misrepresentation, in a way, reflected the politicisation of the dual-mode RE curriculum.

On politicisation of the policy change, HT-13 observed:

I am very much sure that the introduction of RME was based on political grounds. This is so because in schools where BK was being offered, there was no mention of Muhammad. The politicians felt that to balance it out, there was need for all schools to be learning about the Muslim faith. The move had not been welcome in Christian schools and this can be seen as there are quite a few Christian institutions which offer RME (Questionnaire, HT-13).

The idea of politicisation of policy change is also evident in the comments of HT-32:

While BK and RME are basically taught to all Religious Education teachers in colleges and universities, the biggest problem in Malawi was and is that the introduction of RME coincided with the first Moslem State President. If RME had been introduced well before 1994, it was going to be welcome by the majority of Malawian schools. We got our independence in 1964 and schools taught BK for almost thirty years. I understand there are about 15% Moslem population in Malawi, but RME is not supposed to mean Islam, there is more to it than our eyes can see. Those of us who studied Religious Studies in College [know] how good or interesting studies of African Traditional Religion and Islam were. This should have been easily accepted than Social and Development Studies and Science and Technology, if it had come a little earlier than 1994 and if the Christian State Presidents encourage it as something normal (Questionnaire, HT-32).

The point here is that the policy change was understood as a political tool to introduce Islam, making it unacceptable to some members of the Christian faith-communities.

Another contesting space, negating the policy on the premise that it created suspicion among stakeholders, is seen in the response of HT-33:

However the timing and part of the intentions for introducing RME gave a lot of suspicion to the stakeholders (guardians, learners and teachers). Most people feel it was politically motivated because it was introduced at a time when the president was a Moslem and without preparing the teachers. The system of bringing books in schools without giving orientation to the teachers discourages them from implementing the subject. RME includes aspects from different religious faiths of which most teachers do not have adequate background knowledge. Social Studies is the subject which was well implemented because teachers were oriented and RME should have been handled in the same way. Because of this people developed a feeling that it was just imposed (Questionnaire, HT-33).

The above view negated the policy on the premise that it was a political imposition. Such imposition created suspicion about its educational intentions. Lack of teachers' orientation was also understood as part of that imposition.

One can argue here that the suspicion alluded to in the above understanding was due to two competing demands for RE: the exclusion and inclusion of other faiths in the RE curriculum by the Christian and Muslim faith-communities, respectively. The history of education in Malawi shows that RE curriculum space had, for a long time, been the monopoly of one faith - Christianity - at the exclusion of other faiths, such as Islam and African Tradition Religion, despite their long and strong presence.

One possible interpretation here could be that, in an attempt to maintain their monopoly, the Christian faith-communities have wanted RE to be mono-faith in approach. On the other hand, the Muslim faith-communities have sought to end the exclusion of their faith from the RE curriculum by advocating a multi-faith approach. The issue of hegemony was at play here. The Christian faith-communities sought to maintain their domination of the RE curriculum space while the Muslim faith-community sought to end that domination.   From this perspective, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change can be understood as government's attempt to maintain peace among the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. It was introduced as a curriculum initiative aimed at promoting a win-win situation, by accommodating their different demands for RE.

Lack of support of curriculum implementation support is discussed in the next subsection as one of the threats for the dual-mode RE curriculum.

7.2.2.4 Lack of Curriculum Implementation Support

Under this theme, some contesting spaces in the understandings by the head teachers portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a threat for Malawi's national educational system because of lack of adequate implementation support at school level. The lack of support included in-service training for teachers, textbooks, and school visits by the Ministry of Education officials as curriculum planners and advisors.

For instance, negating the policy because of the manner in which it was introduced and its attendant lack of support HT-35 stated:

However, this project suffers the disadvantages of all projects that emanate from the centre to the grassroots or to the periphery: 1) Little support from the headquarters

inspires little motivation among the curriculum implementers themselves i.e. the teachers. There has been very little in-service training, no books that have been provided to teachers. As a result of this teachers of BK are the ones who have taken it upon themselves to teach RME. Most of these are either Christians or Moslems; a thing that has made them handle the subject with biases. 2). In addition no attempt has been made, particularly in the first phase of the innovation, to involve stakeholders, parents, faith groups and the relevant NGOs in terms of explaining the aims of the innovation. As a result, most of these have viewed the project with suspicion. Parents who are fanatics of a particular faith have therefore advised their children not to enroll for one or the other subject if only because they do not know about them (Questionnaire, HT-35).

HT-44 negated the policy change as follows:

Teaching both BK and RME is proving difficult for schools. It is difficult to have teachers to teach both BK and RME. Most teachers were trained to teach BK and have been teaching this subject for a long time. Asking them to teach RME for which they had no training or orientation seems to be unrealistic on the part of the Ministry of Education (Questionnaire, HT-44).

Lack of curriculum implementation support was a major concern here. This was corroborated by statistics on what the head teachers said about textbooks for the subject. For instance, out of 53 head teachers, 35 (66%) said their schools had not received any books for the implementation of the dual-mode RE while 18 (34%) head teachers said they had received books.[92] Textbooks are an important resource for any effective curriculum implementation. Thus, the apparent non-implementation of the policy change in some schools could partly be attributed to lack of textbooks.

Furthermore, school visitations by The Ministry of Education officials as subject curriculum specialists and curriculum advisors constitute another form of support for a new curriculum initiative in schools. Such visits provide teachers the opportunity to interact with curriculum specialists and advisors and share insights on the new curriculum. However, statistics showed that such visitations had not yet been done at the time of the fieldwork for this study (November 2007 to February 2008). For instance, out of 53 head teachers, 45 (85%) said they did not have any visits while only 8 (15%) said they had been visited.[93] Thus, the apparent non-implementation of the policy change in

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[92] See Appendix 8:A8.14
[93] See Appendix 8: Table A8.15

some schools could also partly be attributed to lack of school visitations by curriculum specialists and advisors.

On the provision of in-service training for RE teachers by The Ministry of Education, all 51 (100%) head teachers who answered the question said that their teachers had not yet received any in-service training as a way of supporting them to implement the dual-mode curriculum.[94]   Thus, expecting teachers to teach RME was understood as unfair since they had had no training on multi-faith RE. They were trained for BK as a mono-faith syllabus. The apparent non-implementation of the policy change in some schools could also partly be attributed to lack of training for teachers.

The point here is that the head teachers felt that schools did not have the capacity to change from the old to the new RE curriculum. This resonates with Fullan's (2007, p. 58) claim that "capacity building at early stages is consistent with …how people change". The dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was negated on the premise that there was no capacity building for its implementation.

The next section discusses the findings as the voice of faith-community leaders.

7.2.1   The Voice of Faith-Community Leaders

Under this subsection, the voice of the faith-community leaders is discussed under five themes, portraying the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum for Malawi. The first theme highlights lack of consultation prior to curriculum policy change. The second minimises the value of policy change on the premise that it negates learners' character development. The third theme illuminates the problem of hegemony while the fourth foregrounds lack of teachers and teaching materials for RME. The fifth theme negates the value of the policy because of the tension created between the secular and sacred conception of RE.

Lack of curriculum consultation is discussed in the next subsection as one of the threats to the dual mode RE curriculum policy change.

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[94] See Appendix 8: Table A8.16

7.2.3.1 Lack of Consultation Prior to Curriculum Policy Change

Under this theme, some contesting spaces in the understandings by the faith-community leaders negated the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The negation was on the premise that there was no curriculum consultation during the development of the policy. In some instances, particular reference was made to the multi-faith syllabus of RME, which the Christian faith-communities opposed in 2000. The multi-faith syllabus was initially introduced to replace BK. However, there were instances where other faith-communities acknowledged that there was consultation in which they even took part before the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was introduced.

One contesting space was reflected in the understanding that some stakeholders resisted the policy once it was introduced because The Ministry of Education did not consult them during the policy-formulation process. One faith-community leader (FC-2) in negated the policy as follows:

Because during the development of this curriculum or this change of system, churches would have been given a say; if they had a say, then we would say the reaction shows that their say on the syllabus was neglected. But otherwise, to my knowledge, we were not consulted. So this type of imposing policies on people will always have such repercussions or such reactions (Interview, FC-2).

The repercussions or reactions alluded to in the above understanding involved the Christian faith-communities' resistance to multi-faith RE in 2000 and the subsequent controversy. The resistance and controversy led to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001.

Another faith-community leader (FC-1) described the policy change as unfair because The Ministry of Education introduced it without formal communication to their faith-community. The faith-community had heard from the grapevine that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was being implemented in schools. This negation was expressed as follows:

… I don't remember having received any formal communication. And to be honest with you, most of the schools belong to the Christians. And as of now we don't know if any of us have received any formal communication from the Ministry of Education. But what we

*are hearing from people is that… there is a policy and it has started being implemented.
If this policy is being implemented behind our back or without involving [our faith-community] I think the administrators or education officials are not being fair to one
community, which is [our] community (Interview, FC-1).*

In the minutes of the first national consultative committee meeting on RME, FC-3

complained of lack of consultation and is on record to have made this observation:

> [FC-3] as the second largest proprietor of schools in the country was not
> consulted in the process of developing the new syllabus. A good testimony is the
> Acknowledgement page that list down seven personalities without [our faith-community].

It should be emphasised here that this lack of consultation was in connection with the

multi-faith RE syllabus. However, documentary evidence (Ministry of Education, 1991;

Phiri, 1987, 1988) shows that consultations were done. These led to the adoption of the

multi-faith approach in 1987 in primary teacher training colleges, and in 1991, in primary

schools.[95]

Despite the claim that there was lack of consultations, some faith-communities

acknowledged that they were consulted and even participated in the discussion and

negotiation leading to the introduction of the policy change in 2001. For instance, FC-6

observed that faith-communities were asked by the Ministry of Education to make

contributions at the time the multi-faith syllabus was being developed:

*I remember that we were given a chance to look at it and then give our feelings to that.
And our feelings were that we should not completely remove Bible Knowledge; we should
have the two, if the government feels that they want to introduce Religious and Moral
Education, then Bible Knowledge should not be removed (Interview, FC-6).*

Similarly, FC-4 acknowledged that they were familiar with the dual-mode RE curriculum

policy change, as follows:

*[We] are very much familiar with the change and actually… [we] fought against this
policy because [we] saw it as a way of promoting the other religions apart from
Christianity using the political route. So [we] fought against this policy and…insisted
that we continue with the teaching of Bible Knowledge in schools. Of course finally [we]
were also part of the resolution which government made with the faith-community to the
effect that – to take into consideration the interests of other faith groups – we should have*

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[95] As discussed in Chapter Two

in public schools a dual-system of religious curriculum, where we have the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of other religions in Moral and Religious Education (Interview, FC-4).

Another contesting space acknowledged the faith-communities' awareness of the policy change. The policy was understood as partly a result of the faith-communities' opposition to the multi-faith syllabus in 2000. FC-3 commented:

[We] are aware of this [policy] and I think it all started from this end too. Because having studied the syllabus that was introduced in 2000, we discovered that there were certain aspects which we did not agree with; because Bible Knowledge was almost eliminated completely. There were just a few spots where you could see Biblical references. So I know it was from here, from this end, [some of our leaders] went to complain to the Minister [of Education] about this. So we came together …in a meeting. We discussed, we looked at the syllabus and we discovered that it was really anti-Christian. …So eventually it was agreed that I think it is better we develop two sets…of Religious Education. Those who want specifically Bible Knowledge should have their own syllabus and those who want to mix. For us Religious and Moral Education is…all history… without the spiritual touch which we want the child to grow with so that he has a moral and spiritual touch growing together with his social development and physical (Interview, FC-3).

One point to note here is that the above understanding was partly an admission of the ideological conflict between supporters of RE as a religious activity and supporters of RE as an educational activity. The policy was therefore understood as accommodating the two ideological positions about RE for public schools.

Thus, apparently curriculum consultations were there. One can argue that those claiming the contrary were just looking for an excuse for resisting the dual-mode RE curriculum. The resistance was possibly against the curriculum space given to other faiths apart from the Christian faith. In effect, that contesting space was a reflection of politics of the school curriculum. Different people understood the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change differently.

The next subsection discusses how the faith-community leaders understood the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as negating the character development of the learners.

7.2.3.2   Curriculum Policy Change Negating Learners' Character Development

Other contesting spaces in the understandings by the faith-communities portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum as a threat because of its negative impact on the learners' moral or character development. The claim here was that the opportunity for moral or character development of learners was not available in schools as was the case before the policy was introduced. Because of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, many schools were opting not to offer RE just as some learners were opting not to study RE. This claim was based on the premise that the policy was understood differently by schools, leading to curriculum implementation variations. While the policy stipulated that schools should offer BK and RME, not all schools understood the policy the same way. That difference led to three implementation options. Firstly, some schools opted not to offer RE at all. Secondly, other schools opted to offer BK only or RME only. Thirdly, other schools offered both BK and RME. Furthermore, even in schools where RE was offered, some learners opted not to take any of two – BK or RME.   The claim was that such variations had affected negatively the moral development of learners.

The idea that the curriculum space for the cultivation of morals was reduced in schools is observed in the comments of FC-2:

Those of us from the faith-community, especially from the Christian community, we still believe that this rotten society we have it is because people are lacking something. When we talk of proliferation of crime: kugwirira ana [raping children], kugwirira azimayi [raping women], kudulana manja m'mabanja [chopping off spouse's hands], and so on and so forth. Most of those are coming in because our values have been eroded or are being eroded. ... The Bible for which we stand as Christians says: phunzitsa mwana akadali wang'ono ndipo sadzachoka mnjira - train the child while he is young and will not depart from the way – that is from proverbs. And Psalms again says: chiyambi chanzeru ndikuopa Mulungu [fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom]. Now we remove that kuopa Mulungu [The fear of the Lord] part that we want our children to be educated, they will become educated salvages or fools because the moral component is gone.

Now as...both [BK and RME] are electives, children opt not to take either of them. Now with that, the moral part is completely gone. And who shall we expect to be modeling our children, because the Bible is a tool for modeling? For Muslims, they say the Qur'an is, because these religions tend to shape your character. ... So I think there is something

which we have lost and are losing by making religions smaller subjects which one can opt to take or not (Interview, FC-2).

One point to note here is that in the above understanding RE was conceived from a confessional and moral perspective, aiming at leading learners to moral development based on the fear of the Lord. FC-3 observed that:

So we would like if the Ministry of Education could follow up Religious and Moral Education because we are saying Religious Education provides the moral aspect of a person's life. To train the moral part of the person, it is only through Religious Education. So when we leave out Religious Education, it's like we are giving pupils freedom to do what they want without regard to the aspects of human life, spirituality and morality (Interview, FC-3).

The above views foregrounded the attention given to the moral dimension of RE. The optionality of the dual-mode RE curriculum was understood as negating the moral or character development of learners. The policy change did not provide enough curriculum space for the cultivation of morals among learners. This claim revealed the connection that some people see between religion and morality in society.

However, moral or character development cannot be left to RE alone. In fact, there are various sources of moral or character development. One does not necessarily need to study religion or to be religious to have good character. It is, however, true that the moral dimension of religions can and does contribute to the moral or character development of people in society. Religions teach their respective members what is right or wrong, good or bad. On this claim, one silence was on how the dual-mode RE curriculum could promote moral or character development of learners given its two oppositional or contradictory spaces: BK and RME. The contention of this study is that the curriculum's contribution to moral development is negated by its dual-nature.

In the next subsection, I discuss the faith-communities negation of the dual-mode RE curriculum because of promoting hegemony.

7.2.3.3   Curriculum Policy Change Reflecting Hegemony

Under this theme, some faith-community leaders understood the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a reflection of hegemony. It was consequence of politicising

the teaching of religion in schools. To that extent, the policy was negated as a political tool for promoting Islam at the expense of Christianity. This negation reflected the struggle for power or domination between faith-communities. It was a case of some faith-communities wishing to maintain their domination and of other faith-communities wishing to end their exclusion from the RE curriculum.

Commenting on politicisation of the RME syllabus FC-1 stated:

To go by what has been documented in the press especially in the print media…we note the politicisation of this syllabus. For example, this emanates from the time the previous president who was a Muslim was in power. People looked at him as somebody who wanted to Islamise. It was fashionably claimed that he wanted to Islamise Malawi. So they politicised [RME] and rejected it on the political basis (Interview, FC-1).

One point to note here is that reference was made to the inclusion of Islam in the multi-faith syllabus of RME as an attempt to suppress Christianity while promoting Islam. This was implied in the expression "to Islamise Malawi". However, this was overstretching imagination about the possible impact of RME as a multi-faith syllabus. Although RME is multi-faith, drawing its content from Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, claiming that such an approach could lead to Islamising of Malawi would be difficult to justify.

Politically, however, such a claim reflected, a struggle for power among the different faith-communities. More specifically, it manifested the Christian faith-communities' reluctance to give other faiths space in the school curriculum in Malawi, which had hitherto been dominated by Christianity. As Ross (1992) observes, the Christian faith-communities have tended to conduct themselves as gatekeepers of the religious space in Malawi. Consequently, as observed by Tengatenga (1997), religious pluralism poses a challenge for the Christian faith-communities because Malawi's religious diversity necessitates opening up the religious space for other faith-communities. Thus, the RE curriculum has to change from mono-faith to multi-faith. Furthermore, there is some reflection of tension, among the faith-communities, between cultivating a common good and serving individual interests (Boman, 2006) when negotiating what should be

provided as RE in public schools. The resistance to the change from mono-faith to multi-faith RE curriculum reflects the struggle between conflicting beliefs.

A slightly different understanding about the political nature of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was expressed by FC-4:

Moreover…what I can say is the whole essence of education is intended to meet a political agenda. Because education is provided, is defined, by the elites. It is defined by the politburo. The package – what you call a curriculum – is defined by people who are privileged to make decisions for others. And always most of the times, these choices are made to promote a political view of one group that is in power at that particular point in time. In fact, the advantage that we have now is that we are in a democratic situation, where although the key people may choose what to teach, the general public can voice their concern and reject; the way they rejected the policy of 2000. So… to me every education programme is a political tool (interview, FC-4).

Although not directly accepting that the dual-mode RE curriculum was politicised, the above understanding portrayed the policy as political, responding to Malawi's political needs. The inclusion of BK and RME was a strategy by the government to align its national curriculum to the political vision of maintaining peace and unity among its people (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). The resistance to the dual-mode RE curriculum was understood as a democratic expression of the concerned people with respect to what they wanted to be taught as RE in schools.

Lack of resources as a negating factor, according to the faith-community leaders, is discussed in the next sub-section.

7.2.3.4 Lack of Teachers and Teaching Materials for Religious and Moral Education

Under this theme, other contesting spaces in the understandings by the faith-communities tended to negate the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change because of lack of curriculum implementation support. The negation was in terms of lack trained-teachers as well as teaching and learning materials. In most cases, the contestation was made in reference to RME, which was negated on the premise that it was introduced against a background of unpreparedness on the part of The Ministry of Education.

For instance, FC-2 negated the dual-mode RE curriculum as follows:

...in our schools today no one is able to take that subject and teach it in the class. And even teaching materials are not there. And you can find a teacher able to do it but no teaching materials (Interview, FC-2).

Lack of resources was also pointed out during the national consultation meetings that were held in the wake of the opposition to the RME in 2000. The resolution of such consultation meetings led to the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001. For instance, FC-3's comments on this matter are recorded in the minutes of the first national consultative committee meeting as follows:

RME … has no books to back it up; teachers are asked to improvise on teaching and learning aids. Teachers are also asked to depend on resource persons. [FC-3] wonders how the Ministry is going to train teachers for this subject to cater for the schools.

The impression here was that the curriculum's value could have been enhanced with the provision of adequate resources. However, the dual-nature of the curriculum was not perceived as problematic, despite its educational contradictions in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology of RE.

The next subsection discusses tension between the secular and sacred conception of RE as a negating factor, according to the faith-community leaders.

7.2.3.5 Tension between Secular and Sacred Conception of Religious Education

Some contesting spaces in the understandings by the faith-communities reflected tension between the secular (academic) and the sacred (religious) conception of RE in public schools. A secular conception is underpinned by the desire to promote the academic development of the learners, by helping them to develop critical knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon. Such a conception of RE takes a non-confessional approach (Carr, 2007; Hull, 1984, 2007). A sacred conception, on the other hand, is informed by the desire to lead the learners to a confession of, and commitment to, a faith, adopting a confessional approach (Carr, 2007). Thus, whilst the faith-communities were in favour of a sacred conception of RE, the government was pushing

for a secular conception. For the faith-communities, the conflict between the secular-

sacred conception of RE negated the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Commenting on the apparent secular-sacred tension, FC-2 responded:

But looking at [RE] from a Christian point of view, the Bible Knowledge, the way it was introduced by the missionaries was just beyond teaching as a subject. It was…also for transformation…and the approach was more Christian approach, not like academic approach. And that was aimed at teaching us morals. …But of late it became more academic (Interview, FC-2).

Further comments on the secular-sacred contestations are recorded in the minutes of the

first national consultative committee meeting as follows:

There are sections of the syllabus whose content is considered "Chikunja" [pagan] that [FC-2] cannot allow teaching in her schools. … [FC-2] suspects RME is bent to promote certain religious beliefs. [FC-2] wonders why RME should replace a syllabus that serves the interests of the people best. Churches establish schools to teach the Bible and therefore, the Bible cannot just be replaced anyhow. African Traditional Religion is okay to those who have grounds for it, but for [FC-2] it is irrelevant. Reasons for the change from Bible Knowledge to RME are not properly articulated. [FC-2] does not accept the pedagogical approach that only imparts knowledge without conversion. To [FC-2] conversion and teaching are complementary. [FC-2] feels Bible Knowledge should be left in the Christian (church) schools, the other religions may be taught in the public schools.

One insight here is that the dual-mode RE was under contestation for its academic or

educational approach to the teaching of religion in schools. The faith-community leaders

above did not support teaching RE for the sake of academic knowledge and

understanding only without leading learners to any religious commitment or confession.

Furthermore, from a confessional and mono-faith perspective, under contestation was the

inclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum together with a pedagogical approach

that sidelined conversion.

FC-6, who was overtly in favour of a sacred conception of RE declared:

With us we also favour Bible Knowledge…The function of Bible Knowledge should be to prepare the students for the second coming of Christ. Basically as we teach, we should aim at teaching Bible as it appears from the Bible…so that they can prepare for Christ (Interview, FC-6).

Furthermore, FC 6's preference for BK to RME, is evident in the following response:

I think basically it's the contents of the Religious and Moral Education syllabus. It appears there is a lot that has gone in there. And-you know-depending on what you believe in, some of the things which are there we don't believe in them. And being a Christian education institution, we have our own values. So, we would like to see that every pupil that comes through our doors learns Bible in the context of the values that we have; where we mind the truths that are obtained from the Bible (Interview, FC-6).

Thus, for the above faith-community leader, RE should promote Christian values based on the Bible. Anything short of that is in conflict with Christian values.

A similar understanding was expressed by FC-4 as follows:

Well, the view of the faith-community which I am representing… is that religion is their main agenda. And as such they will always want their schools to teach religion and by religion they mean Bible Knowledge. So they are always happy that BK should be part of the curriculum in their schools if not the schools of the country (Interview, FC-4).

From the above understanding, I wish to argue that although the government may want to include other religions in the RE curriculum, contestation is likely. As such, there is need for negotiation with faith-communities in favour of BK only. The negotiation should focus on the paradigm shift from a sacred to a secular conception of RE. The agenda of RE should be to promote discursive space for cultivating dialogue across difference. An academic conception would make such a space possible, where critical knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon would be promoted.

Another contesting space, related to the secular-sacred tension, was the understanding that adopting the dual-mode RE curriculum was an apparent disregard of the history of education in Malawi. Some Christian faith-communities used the history of education in Malawi to contest the dual-mode RE curriculum and justify their preference for the exclusion of other religions in the school curriculum. Their claim was that the main agenda of the Christian missionaries - who started schools for formal western education in Malawi - was evangelisation; spreading the Christian faith among learners. That was why other faiths were excluded from the RE curriculum. From this perspective, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was, therefore, a disregard of that historical tradition.

For instance, promoting exclusivism in RE premised on the history of education in Malawi, FC-4 observed that:

Well, I think we have to follow the historicity of education in Malawi to say that before government intervention, education was actually introduced as a means of converting the people to Christianity. So to [our faith community] that was the primary reason for introducing education. It was to assist [us] to evangelise. Now after the government took over responsibility of providing education, then, [we] have used… religion as [our] own identity. It's our identity as Christians. So, as far as [we] are concerned. …[we] would always want Bible Knowledge to be taught in all the schools because that's the root of our faith in the country (Interview, FC-4).

Contesting the dual-mode RE curriculum on the premise of the history of education in Malawi and the contribution of Christian faith-communities' to education, FC-2 had this to say:

Even education itself, as you are well aware that history has it that education in Malawi came with the churches – missionaries. Currently it is still the churches who control almost 60% of education facilities in this country. Now looking at this major stakeholder; for this major stakeholder to make an outcry after something has already been introduced, it means there was a problem somewhere (Interview, FC-2).

One insight here is that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy marked the opening up of the curriculum space which had been the monopoly of the Christian faith. Other faiths such Islam and African Traditional Religions were now given curriculum space. However, the faith-communities above wanted to use history to justify and legitimatise hegemony of their faith in the RE curriculum. Such use of history reflected the difficulty of coming out the shackles of the historicity of education in Malawi and letting go privileging of one religion in the RE curriculum. In a sense, the history of education can be used to theorise the different stances taken by the faith-communities, on the one hand, and The Ministry of Education, on the other hand.

The expression 'classic exclusivism' has been used in this study to denote the Christian missionary exclusion of other religions or faiths from the RE in their schools. This was exclusion at the time education was under the control of the missionaries. In contrast, the expression 'progressive exclusivism' has been used to describe continued exclusion of

other faiths from the RE curriculum after government had taken control of the provision of school education.[96]

The contention here is that by insisting on the exclusion of other religions from the school curriculum, the Christian faith-communities were promoting progressive exclusivism in RE. Furthermore, the use of history of education as a justification for progressive exclusivism in RE was informed by a sacred conception and confessional approach (Carr, 2007). In a sense, the dual-mode RE curriculum partly marked a departure from RE as sacred activity to RE as an educational activity. The departure was partly since the mono-faith space of BK still provided the possibility for conceptualising RE as a religious activity, at least from the perspective of the above faith-communities. Otherwise it is possible to offer BK with a non-confessional approach, as an educational activity. In fact, BK's non-denominational approach is an attempt at that educational conception of RE (Ministry of Education, 1982a, 1982b). One weakness, however, would be its limited scope in terms of promoting critical knowledge and understanding of religion as a crucial dimension of human and social life. This limitation results from its mono-faith approach.

Another insight was that the use of historical interpretation to legitimate progressive exclusivism in RE was a contesting space in the dual-mode curriculum policy change. Although the formulation and implementation of education policy is now under government control, some faith-communities still favour the Christian missionary tradition of using RE as a tool for evangelisation. This situation resonates with Hull's (2007) observation that historical traditions and experiences of each country are likely to influence how the RE curriculum might look like. Thus, the dual-mode RE curriculum was influenced, to some extent, by the history of education in Malawi.

As discussed in Chapter Two, a critical observation can be made here that contesting the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum on the grounds that there were no trained teachers and consultation does not hold water. This is because The University of Malawi has always been training RE teachers to handle Christianity, Islam and African

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[96] As discussed in Chapter Two

Traditional Religions for a long time from the mid 1980s.[97] Furthermore, the development of the RME syllabus was done in consultation with representatives of the faith-communities. Probably the representatives did not report back to their faith-communities the proposed curriculum changes, for purposes of accountability. Nonetheless, this observation does not mean that it was unimportant for The Ministry of Education to officially seek views of the faith-communities when it had decided to adopt the multi-faith RE curriculum. The argument here is that the circular letter[98], which The Ministry of Education wrote to the faith-communities and other stakeholders, was just for their information. It did not solicit their views on the policy which The Ministry had decided to adopt and implement (O'Dala, 2001).

7.3   Chapter Summary

This chapter has analysed and theorised contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum for Malawi. Different reasons were given for negating the policy change. The main claim made is that the contesting spaces were a reflection of politics of the school curriculum. They also reflected the different meanings of the policy change for The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. One striking finding was that the contesting spaces were silent on the educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum. The contention is that because BK and RME represent oppositional ontology, epistemology and methodology of RE, they create educational contradictions about the role of RE in public schools. The contradictions negate the curriculum on educational grounds. However, according to the voices of the research participants, emphasis on the policy's educational value tended to mask such contradictions and its supposedly 'real' value.[99] The 'real' value was political; providing a win-win situation for the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. This claim has matured into the thesis of the study in Chapter Nine.

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[97] The author was a product and graduate of that training in 1988
[98] See Appendix 9
[99] The expression 'real' value is used here to denote the hidden value or value beneath the apparent value

Part Three, comprising Chapters Six and Seven, has represented the research findings as politics of the school curriculum. The contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum have been theorised as a manifestation of that politics. In Part Four, which is comprised of Chapters Eight and Nine, the study is propelled into a higher mode of abstraction and theorisation within the overarching framework of politics of the school curriculum.

Part Four: Propelling the Study into a Higher Mode of Abstraction

This is the last part of the study, comprising Chapters Eight and Nine. This is where the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy are propelled into a higher mode of theorisation as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

In particular, Chapter Eight argues for the unmasking of ideological underpinnings of the contesting spaces. On the other hand, Chapter Nine postulates the thesis of the study and offers the author's concluding reflections.

Chapter Eight

Deconstructing Ideological Underpinnings of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum

The effect of a deconstructive approach is to question the assumed educational, theoretical or moral superiority of particular worldviews or dominant paradigms in educational research and practice[100].

8.1   Introduction

In this chapter the theorisation of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum is propelled into a higher level of abstraction. This is done within the overarching framework of politics of the school curriculum. As the header quotation of this chapter describes, a deconstructive approach is employed to challenge the contesting spaces in the understandings portraying the opportunities or weaknesses and/or threats of the curriculum policy change for Malawi. Vincent (1995, p. 187) observes that, deconstruction examines "the basic, often unconscious conventions, beliefs and oppositions within texts, in order to exhibit their arbitrariness or ambiguity." This is what this chapter seeks to achieve by deconstructing the ideological underpinnings of politics of the school curriculum as reflected in the contesting spaces regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary schools in Malawi.

Thus, in this chapter, critical attention is paid to the value attributed to the curriculum policy change. It inevitably disturbs the taken-for-granted value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The intended effect is to unmask the ideological assumptions underpinning the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum, as expressed by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. It is based on Segundo's (1976, p. 9) notion of "ideological suspicion". This notion entails a questioning of the status quo of a phenomenon (Waddington, 1996a), under study.

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[100] Atkinson, 2003, p. 37

The essence of all the understandings acknowledged the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for Malawi in terms of its perceived opportunities or weaknesses and/or threats. However, the understandings failed to acknowledge the contradictions embedded in the curriculum. The substantive claim is that by embracing two opposite RE spaces in the same national school system, the curriculum creates ambiguities about the role of RE in schools. For one thing, BK syllabus is mono-faith, which means that its ontology, epistemology, and methodology promote exclusivism in RE. On the contrary, RME syllabus is multi-faith, promoting inclusivist and/or pluralist ontology, epistemology, and methodology of RE.

Deconstructing the understandings has entailed theorising what is being 'normalized' and 'abnormalised' as RE curriculum theory and practice for secondary schools in Malawi and for what reasons. A deconstructive approach helps to illuminate how certain things get accepted in society as normal or abnormal. As Cary (2006, p.186) argues:

> This is a call for the study of how we are normalized, how we are embedded within total institutions and how we engage in and negotiate the production of legitimate knowledge. This embeddedness excludes certain ways of being and erases the bodies of those students, teachers, parents, custodians and others who are considered deviant, or outside the norm.

More specifically and from a deconstructive perspective, the chapter unmasks underpinning ideologies, hegemony, the privileged space, and the educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. Certain assumptions about what should be normal and accepted as RE for public schools and what should not are interrogated and brought under a critical gaze. As Atkinson (2003) puts it, a deconstructive approach questions the assumed educational, theoretical or moral superiority of particular perspectives in educational research and practice. The question here relates to the ideological underpinnings of politics of the school curriculum illuminated by the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change (as represented in Chapters Six and Seven). It is argued that in essence, such ideological underpinnings tended to emphasise the perceived educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change but fell short of acknowledging or problematising three issues: hegemony of the Christian faith, the privileged space for the

Christian faith, and the educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum.

Four points can be raised here in relation to this apparent silence. Firstly, it was possible, that the participants did not have the language with which to discuss and problematise the hegemony, privileged space, and educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum. Secondly, perhaps these problematic issues were not visible to the participants. Thirdly, probably the perceived value of the curriculum, both as an asset or a liability, inadvertently masked the hegemony of the Christian faith and its privileged space as well as the curriculum's educational contradictions. Fourthly, the silence could be deliberate, intended to mask the three problematic issues.

Whatever the cause of the silence might be, one would have expected The Ministry of Education officials, as education policy-makers at the national level, together with the secondary school head teachers, as leaders in making curriculum decisions and choices at school level, to notice or worry about the educational contradictions of the curriculum. For the faith-communities, perhaps their preoccupation with the transmission and propagation of their respective faith might have worked to obscure noticing such contradictions.

The next section deconstructs and theorises the ideological posturing of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

8.2   Ideological Posturing and the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change

The aim of this section is twofold: first, to unmask the ideological assumptions underpinning the understandings; and second, to theorise contesting spaces in curriculum policy change as a reflection of politics of the school curriculum. One aspect of politics of the school curriculum relates to the concept of curriculum as an ideology (Apple, 2008, 2004; Kelly, 1999; Matheson, 2004; Meighan, 1986; Schwab, 1969; Sutton &

Levinson, 2001; Vincent, 1995). This concept in the main, posits that different ideologies held by different people influence the curriculum. Educational ideology is usually described as a set of beliefs by a group of people about what education should be. The various understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change reflected the curriculum as a battleground for competing ideologies (Kelly, 1999).

The understandings reflected different ideological assumptions by the research participants. One claim here is that, among other things, such assumptions were informed by the participants' public theology of religions which underpinned their attitude towards other religions. Another claim is that public theology of religions tended to influence the conception RE in public schools, either as a religious or an educational activity (Hull, 1984), confessional or non-confessional RE (Carr, 2007). A third claim is that such ideological assumptions underpinned how the research participants perceived the meaning and value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

The substantive argument is that the dual-mode RE curriculum promotes hegemony of the Christian faith over other religions. Christianity is privileged over other faiths in the RE school curriculum. By privileging knowledge of one faith, the wisdom of having RE appropriate for a democratic and religiously diverse society is lost. As T.S Eliot (1971, p. 96) asks:

> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
> Where is knowledge we have lost in information?

The argument here is that by allowing exclusivism in RE to continue, the wisdom of leading stakeholders, including the Christian and Muslim faith-communities, in negotiating for RE curriculum policy that can promote constructive dialogue across difference, is lost. The existence of mono-faith RE reflects the desire to promote knowledge of one religion at the exclusion of others. On the other hand, multi-faith RE reflects a different conception of RE, intended to promote knowledge of religion by teaching many religions. Thus, different ideologies seemed to inform the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.

The study argues that, to regain the wisdom lost in knowledge (Eliot, 1971), there is need to reconceptualise RE in a manner that creates a discursive space where dialogue across difference is promoted. Privileging one religion in public schools should cease. The urgency of such a curricular shift becomes obvious by an honest acknowledgement of the school as a discursive space serving learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. As Wardekker and Miedema (2007) observe, RE needs a new interpretation and new school practices to remain meaningful in our present society. The argument here is that in the absence of such a new interpretation, RE will continue to be ambiguous, accommodating contradictory spaces for school practices, as is the case with the dual-mode RE curriculum.

The next section unmasks public theology of religions informing the contestation over the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change.

8.2.1   Public Theology of Religions and the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum

One ideology underpinning the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum relates to the concept of public theology (de Gruchy, 2007). Central to public-theology analysis is the interface between theology and public policy.[101]   The main thrust of public theology is that, in a democratic society, there is need to promote the common good by witnessing to the core values rather than seeking privilege for a particular religion (de Gruchy, 2007). It can be argued here that this notion needs to be promoted in all societies, not only in democratic societies.

In Chapter Four, I presented a conceptual framework based on the theology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (D' Costa, 1986; Hick & Hebblethwaite, 1980; Knitter, 1985) to unmask some of the ideological assumptions underpinning the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum. As represented in Chapters Six

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[101]   This is discussed in Chapter Four

and Seven, the claim here is that public theology can inform people's ideologies,
influence the way people understand the value of RE, impede or enhance negotiations for
RE curriculum for public schools.

Furthermore, a claim here is that the theological underpinnings were more pronounced in
the understandings by the faith-communities than by the Ministry of Educational officials
or secondary school head teachers. This may not be surprising since the preoccupation of
the faith-communities is theological. For them, teaching religion in schools was
understood more as a sacred (religious) activity than a mere secular (academic) activity.
It is because of this preoccupation that their understandings have been foregrounded in
this section, without neglecting those of The Ministry of Education officials and head
teachers.

The next sub-section theorises the ideological underpinnings of the contesting spaces in
the dual-mode RE curriculum, using a theology of exclusivism as its lens.

8.2.1.1   Theology of Exclusivism

The theology of *exclusivism* (D' Costa, 1986) accepts one religion while rejecting other
religions as a means of gaining salvation (See Chapter Four). It, therefore, promotes
exclusivist attitudes toward other faiths. People practising their religion using this
theology might find it difficult to accept other religions on an equal basis. By extension,
such people may not favour the teaching of other people's religions in schools. As such,
negotiating for RE curriculum that includes other religions would be difficult with such
people since they would likely support mono-faith rather than multi-faith RE. The
argument here is that some of the contesting spaces discussed in Chapters Six and seven
displayed an exclusivist theological attitude.

In all, the understandings by all the six faith-communities interviewed for this research
agreed that RE should be taught in public schools. However, that position was for
different reasons and underpinned by different theological assumptions. Theology of

267

exclusivism seemed to inform the Christian faith-communities' understandings. More specifically, the Christian faith-communities tended to support a mono-faith RE in schools, mainly for historical or evangelical/faith or moral reasons. On the other hand, the Muslim faith-community tended to support a multi-faith RE, apparently for academic reasons.

For instance, one understanding by some of the Christian faith-communities foregrounded the historicity of education in Malawi. The history of education in Malawi was used to justify exclusivism in RE in schools. Their argument was that the main agenda of the missionaries, who started western formal education in Malawi, was evangelisation; spreading the Christian faith among learners. Other religions were, therefore, excluded in RE offered in the Christian mission schools.[102] The following comment by a faith-community leader (FC-4) testifies to this:

Well, I think we have to follow the historicity of education in Malawi to say that before government intervention, education was actually introduced as a means of converting the people to Christianity. ... that was the primary reason for introducing education. It was to assist them to evangelise. Now after the government took over responsibility of providing education, then, [we] have used... religion as [our] own identity. It's our identity as Christians (Interview, FC-4).

In the above understanding, historical interpretation was directed toward the validation and justification of exclusivism in RE. Thus, although the formulation and implementation of education policy is now under government control, the above faith-community tended to support the Christian missionary tradition of conceptualising RE as a tool for evangelisation. It was a case of progressive exclusivism in RE in schools, where spreading of the Christian faith was understood as the main agenda.

The claim here is that the use of history to justify exclusion of non-Christian religions in the RE curriculum was underpinned by a theology of exclusivism. Multi-faith RE was understood as a departure from that historical tradition. Thus, history can lead to contesting spaces in curriculum policy change as well as inform politics of the school

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[102] As discussed in Chapter Two

curriculum. Informed by a theology of exclusivism, the Christian faith-communities attempted to influence the conduct of RE by alluding to how education started in Malawi and the role of RE in that enterprise. This use of history resonates with Hull's (2007) observation that historical traditions and experiences of each country are likely to influence how the RE curriculum might look like.

However, from a deconstructive perspective (Atkinson, 2003), it can be argued that, underlying such use of historical tradition is an element of hegemony. As Slattery (2006, p. 38) observes, "when a singular historical view dominates and the cultural context is controlled by …elites, [it] results in hegemony." From this perspective, justifying the exclusion of other faiths in the RE curriculum on the premise of Malawi's historical tradition was, in itself, hegemonic. It sought to maintain domination of the Christian faith in the RE curriculum over other faiths.

Furthermore, a critical analysis of the history of education in Malawi shows that exclusivism in RE had negative social impact. It disadvantaged people who belonged to different faith-communities or denominations. One requirement for school attendance was that learners had to convert to the Christian denomination owning the school or miss formal western education altogether (Chidester, et al., 1994). This was what I describe as classic exclusivism, done at the time when education was entirely in the hands of the Christian faith-communities.

Members of the Muslim faith-community were negatively affected by this approach. Muslim parents, who did not want to expose their children to the likelihood of converting to Christianity, opted to keep their children away from the Christian mission schools (Chakanza, 2000). This negative impact was acknowledged by FC-2 as follows:

Now… in this country, Muslims were not sending their children to Christian schools. And apparently, since they didn't have their schools in the past, Muslims lagged behind in education, mostly those who were very strict and did not want their children to go to Christian schools. What they were running away from was Bible Knowledge. Because schools mostly were by missionaries whose aims were to use the schools as a tool for evangelisation. So that too had an impact (Interview, FC-2).

Thus, taking into account the negative social impact of exclusivism and hegemony in RE, the dual-mode RE can be criticised for creating a space for exclusivism. In its mono-faith space the hegemony of the Christian faith is maintained. In the final analysis, the curriculum reflects politics of the school curriculum. It came in as an attempt by government to end exclusivism and hegemony by changing from mono-faith to multi-faith RE. However, the Christian faith-communities contested such a change by rejecting the replacement of BK with RME, using the history of education in Malawi as a justification. This contestation is a challenge for RE curriculum theory and practice, which has to take cognizance of the way in which education started in Malawi and the role played by RE in that enterprise.

One point to note here is that exclusivism and hegemony have implications for curriculum development and negotiation with stakeholders. One implication is that at policy-making level, a decision has to be made by government between continuing and discontinuing with exclusivism in RE in the context of Malawi's democracy and religious diversity. The dual-mode RE curriculum policy seems to be an attempt to continue with exclusivism in the mono-faith space of BK whilst introducing elements of inclusivism or pluralism in the multi-faith space of RME. By extension, hegemony of the Christian faith is maintained in the mono-faith space while the multi-faith space brings to an end that hegemony. The Christian faith-communities' resistance to the multi-faith RE can be seen as a reflection of exclusivism and hegemony in RE. To that extent, such resistance reflects politics of the school curriculum.

Another form of hegemony is what I have described as progressive exclusivism in RE in Chapter Two. This is because the Christian faith-communities continue to demand for the exclusion of other religions in the public education despite the fact that the government is now in control of the provision of education. This exclusivism is in contrast to classic exclusivism in RE by which other religions were excluded from the school curriculum at the time when the provision of education in Malawi was under the control of the Christian missionaries. The argument here is that exclusivism by the Christian faith-

communities, whether classic or progressive, was informed by a theology of exclusivism, reflecting their ideological posturing.

An instance of progressive exclusivism was expressed by FC-6 who had this to say:

With us we also favour Bible Knowledge…The function of Bible Knowledge should be to prepare the students for the second coming of Christ. Basically as we teach, we should aim at teaching Bible as it appears from the Bible…so that they can prepare for Christ (Interview, FC-6).

Another aspect of progressive exclusivism in RE for the purposes of evangelisation was expressed by FC-4:

Well, the view of the faith-community which I am representing… is that religion is their main agenda. And as such they will always want their schools to teach religion and by religion they mean Bible Knowledge. So they are always happy that BK should be part of the curriculum in their schools if not the schools of the country (Interview, FC-4).

Thus, for the above faith-community leaders, RE was conceived as a tool for promoting Christian values based on the Bible. It had to be BK and the main agenda was to promote religion or faith among learners. This view excluded other religions from the RE curriculum, favouring only BK against RME. With such ideological underpinnings, the possibility of having multi-faith RE in the school is ruled out, creating a contesting space in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Even some head teachers expressed a sense of hegemony and a theology of exclusivism in their understandings. For instance, HT-7 stated:

BK should be taught in schools because most [people of the] population are Christians and there is no need to promote other beliefs. RME can cause conflict in faiths of pupils as the policy does not foresee what will happen to Malawi in 50 years to come (Questionnaire, HT-7)

Another understanding supporting hegemony and exclusivism in RE was expressed by HT-22 who had this comment to make:

Malawi as a nation is dominated by Christians and as such it is useless to bother people to study other religions which may have nothing to do with their spiritual life (Questionnaire, HT-22).

The above views reflected hegemony in RE where faiths of other of people were to be excluded on the basis of the numerical strength of their population in Malawi. Thus, only Christianity should be taught in schools because Christians are in a majority. This view minimises the contribution RE can make to the national goals of education, such as promoting citizenship, ethical and socio-cultural skills appropriate for a democratic and religiously diverse society (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Thus, a theology of exclusivism poses a challenge to the dual-mode RE curriculum in Malawi. It makes resistance to the policy inevitable since preference is for BK to RME. As a result, the curriculum policy is opened up to other implementation possibilities, which were not originally envisaged by the policy-makers. For instance, many Christian schools only offer BK and exclude RME. The curriculum implementation challenges resonate with Darling-Hammond's (1998) observation that although policy change is inevitable for any society, it is difficult to bring that change beyond bureaucracy into practice.

This difficulty was acknowledged by one faith-community leader (FC-3), as follows:

So, basically as of now most of the Christian schools, I don't think they teach this other syllabus. They have stuck to Bible Knowledge (Interview, FC-3).

Commenting on the apparent resistance to the dual-mode RE curriculum, one Ministry of Education official (MOE-1) stated:

So, the worry with the society is that really the young people might get confused because every faith would want its young generation to really know or learn about things from their own faith (Interview, MOE-1).

One point to note here is that the tendency for exclusivism could be seen as a reflection of lack of clarity by the Ministry of Education about the role of RE in schools. As a result, some people still continue to conceptualise RE as a religious activity, aimed at

promoting faith among learners (Hull, 1984; 2007). Secondly, it could be contestation of the inclusion of other faiths in the RE curriculum, which had been the monopoly of the Christian faith for a long time in the history of education in Malawi. To that extent, a public theology of exclusivism may be a factor impeding curriculum policy change in RE in a manner that promotes constructive dialogue across difference.

In the next sub-section, I theorise the ideological underpinnings of the contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum, using a theology of inclusivism as its lens.

8.2.1.2 Theology of Inclusivism

The claim here is that people informed by this theology can adopt an ideological position conducive to accommodation other religions in the school curriculum. This is because they can open constructive dialogue with people of other faith traditions, as discussed in Chapter Four. An inclusivist and multi-faith, rather than an exclusivist and mono-faith curriculum, can still be accepted as one way of promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation among people of different religions.

An ideological position about the dual-mode RE curriculum, informed by a theology of *inclusivism*, was expressed by one faith-community leader (FC-1) as follows:

However…[we] have no problem to learn about [other religions] as such, since [we] are encouraged by [our] religion to learn about other…religions. However, in this age or in this atmosphere or what we call multicultural society…. we needed to have both subjects…presented to our students, whether Christian or Muslim. We believe that when school children or Malawians, as citizens, get to know each other at an early age, they will not have some bigotry or prejudices, when they grow up. They will have known each better than remain in ignorance (Interview, FC-1).

This view supported RE aimed at helping learners to develop knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon in a religiously diverse society. Such a conception can help learners acquire life skills such as greater understanding of self and

others, the clarification of values, cultural literacy, and civil toleration of differences (Chidester et al, 1994).

Another ideological posturing, informed by a theology of inclusivism, was made by one faith-community (FC-5) who had this to say about the dual-mode RE curriculum:

I think bearing in mind that as a country, we have people belonging to different camps in terms of religious circles, our view is that, that is good, especially if the approach is trying to balance. I don't know what that is to achieve. Trying to balance that to say okay on the one hand there is Bible Knowledge, and on the other hand, there are these religious education and moral education stuff. We don't have a problem with that…That's good. But… as a faith-based organisation…we hold the scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of faith (Interview, FC-5).

For the faith-community (FC-5) above, the Bible was the ultimate authority. However, it accepted that, given Malawi's religious diversity, it was good to include other religions in the RE curriculum. This theology can influence RE curriculum theory and practice. To some extent, the dual-mode RE curriculum can be understood as reflecting a theology of inclusivism. The mono-faith space of BK privileges the Christian faith while the multi-faith space of RME includes other faiths. Thus, an inclusivist curriculum is accepted but where Christianity, through the Bible as the ultimate authority, is given prominence over other religions. To that end, BK is preferred to RME. In fact, RME was taken to be for members of the Muslim faith-community, although it includes Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions.

The next sub-section theorises the ideological underpinnings of the contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum, using a theology of pluralism as its lens.

8.2.1.3 Theology of Pluralism

The argument here is some of the contesting spaces regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change reflected an ideological position informed by a theology of *pluralism* (D' Costa, 1986), as discussed in Chapter Four. The claim here is that had the

faith-communities been informed by this theology, they might not have found it difficult to accept the inclusion of other religions in the RE curriculum. A multi-faith RE curriculum would not have been difficult to negotiate and understand in terms of what it seeks to achieve in a pluralistic and religiously diverse society. In Malawi, the replacement of BK, as a mono-faith syllabus with RME, as a multi-faith syllabus, would not have been a problem. Thus, the contestation of multi-faith RE reflects lack of a theology of pluralism. As Ross (1992) has observed, religious pluralism in Malawi is a theological challenge for the Christian faith-communities. They need to embrace a theology of pluralism for them to accept other religions as valid in their own space and right. Religious pluralism is a theological challenge because while the society is becoming religiously diverse, the Christian faith-communities continue to adopt an ideological posturing, informed by an exclusivist theology, and according to which RE is understood as a tool for promoting the Christian faith.

The study argues that a conception of RE informed by a theology of pluralism can support non-confessional RE, aimed at helping learners to develop respect for people whose beliefs and values differ from their own (Steyn, 2004). It can cultivate a discursive space for dialogue across difference. For instance, reflecting this theology, one faith-community leader (FC-1) had this to say:

We believe that when school children or when Malawians as citizens get to know about each other at an early age, they will not have some bigotry or prejudices. When they grow up they will have known each other better than remain in ignorance (Interview, FC-1).

The above understanding can also end exclusivism in RE. In a religiously diverse society, it is imperative that from an early age children should be helped to develop mutual respect and promote dialogue across difference. One of the functions of the school should be to help learners understand the pluralistic society while preparing them to promote unity in diversity. This view reflects the logic of a theology of pluralism which would support a multi-faith RE curriculum as appropriate for a pluralistic society, seeking to

promote religious tolerance and mutual respect among members of diverse religious and non religious backgrounds.

Thus, a theology of pluralism can acknowledge religious diversity and the need for the government to be fair to all faith-communities in matters of RE. To that extent, a multi-faith RE can be favoured without seeking to privilege one religion over other religions.

One point to note here is that public theology of religions plays out differently. From a perspective of public theology of religions, the dual-mode RE curriculum can be theorised as accommodating elements of the three theological stances of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The mono-faith space of BK is exclusivist while the multi-faith-space of RME is pluralist in that the three religions – Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religions - are given equal curriculum space. However, accommodating BK and RME at the same time could be seen as inclusivist in that a privileged space is created for one faith while including other religions in the multi-faith space. Thus, the dual-nature of the curriculum, in itself, reflects an inclusivist theology of religions. Accommodation of the three theological positions leads to educational ambiguity in terms of the role of RE in schools.

One implication here is that while seeking to provide RE appropriate for a religiously diverse society, Malawi's government has to respond to the specific demands by the faith-communities and other social actors. Such demands, underpinned by different theological assumptions, have the effect of creating contesting spaces in RE curriculum theory and practice, as is the case with the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The claim here is that because of the preoccupation with the transmission of knowledge and information about one religion, the wisdom of negotiating for RE curriculum that seeks to witness to the core values of humanity was lost; hence the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

The next sub-section theorises confessional and non-confessional ideologies as part of the ideological posturing informing the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

8.2.2   Confessional and Non-Confessional Ideologies

Two dominant but conflicting ideologies were reflected in the understandings supporting the mono-faith or multi-faith space of the dual-mode RE curriculum. These were the confessional and non-confessional conception of RE (Carr, 2007). The Ministry of Education as a government department and the Christian and Muslim faith-communities were among the dominant groups whose ideologies were reflected in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. More specifically, it was because of the Christian faith-communities' contestation of multi-faith RE that The Ministry of Education was forced to introduce the dual-mode RE curriculum in 2001 as discussed in Chapter Two.

FC-4 described the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum as a product of the dominant ideologies by powerful people in society, as follows:

The package - what you call a curriculum - is defined by people who are privileged to make decisions for others. … (Interview, FC-4).

HT-16 indirectly alluded to the dominant ideologies of the people who were in power at the time the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced as follows:

It is unfortunate that after the teaching of BK in schools for many years then somebody just thought of introducing another subject which is contradicting with BK just for the sake of accommodating the unknown reasons to the Malawians (Questionnaire, HT-16).

FC-2 pointed out the influential position of the Christian faith-communities in determining the dual-mode RE curriculum as follows:

The Church was protesting the removal of Bible Knowledge and completely replacing it with Religious and Moral Education. So that is why they were placed side by side (Interview, FC-2).

Thus, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was partly influenced by the ideologies of the Christian faith-communities who opposed the replacement of BK with RME in schools. It was also partly influenced by the government ideology of teaching religion in schools using a multi-faith approach and as an educational, not a religious, activity. To have a win-win situation for both ideological positions, the dual-mode RE curriculum was introduced. However, this was done at a cost of creating educational ambiguity and contradictions in terms of ontology, epistemology, and methodology of RE.

Furthermore, confessional and non-confessional ideologies of RE underpinned some of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. These two ideologies reflect two distinct ways of conceptualising the teaching of religion in schools: the former as a religious activity and the latter as an educational activity. The claim here is that some of the contesting spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change reflected conflicting demands for confessional or non-confessional RE. In turn, such conflicting demands manifested some dynamics of politics of the school curriculum.

For instance, some understandings reflected the confessional view of RE as evident in the comment by one faith-community (FC-2), recorded in the minutes of the first national consultative meeting in 2000:

[FC-2] does not accept the pedagogical approach that only imparts knowledge without conversion. To [FC-2] conversion and teaching are complementary.

The above view illustrates a case of contestation of non-confessional RE in favour of confessional RE. With a confessional ideology, multi-faith RE would not be supported because it aims at helping learners develop knowledge and understanding of religion as a social phenomenon without leading them to a confession of faith. By extrapolation, it can be argued that, the Christian faith-communities, apparently, understood the BK syllabus as a means for conversion among learners. However, this is not one of the aims of the BK

syllabus.[103] The confessional approach resonates with Hull's (2007) learning-religion

approach which involves the situation where a single religion or faith is taught. Learners

"are expected to participate in the beliefs and practices of the religion being taught"

(Hull, 2007, p. 4). The goal is to enable the learners to come to believe in a religion or to

strengthen their commitment to it.

One point to note here is that in one of the national curriculum consultation meetings, the

Christian faith-communities clearly declared that their view of RE, which was different

from that of the government. The following extract from the minutes of the first national

consultative meeting in 2000 shows the confessional view of the Christian faith-

communities:

> The Christian organisations also observed that the Christian Churches
> have invested a lot in the country all for the purpose of upholding the
> name of Jesus. Christian schools, as part of the Christian Church
> investment cannot be used for the teaching of ATR [African Traditional
> Religion] or Islam.

The teaching of religion in schools was largely viewed by the Christian faith-

communities from a confessional perspective. By implication, BK was understood as

confessional and RME as non-confessional in approach. However, not all faith-

communities expressed the confessional ideology about RE. For instance, a faith-

community leader (FC-1) expressed a non-confessional conception of RE as evident in

the extract from the minutes of the first national consultative meeting in 2000:

> To [FC-1] schools are not intended to preach about and convert people to
> particular religious faith, but rather to transmit knowledge for widening
> the intellectual scope of children.

The above view was non-confessional and a liberal conception of RE. As an educational

activity, the aim of RE should be to help learners develop critical knowledge and

understanding of religion as a dimension of human and social life. It should enable

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[103] See Chapter Two, Sub-Section 2.4.2

learners to appreciate how religion helps some people to find meaning and purpose in life, and how religion affects the world and society in which we live.

In a society with many different religions, there is need to prepare children to live in harmony with people of other cultures and religions. To do this, learners should be helped to develop appreciation and respect for people who differ from themselves. This does not mean that learners or teachers have to believe or approve of other beliefs. It simply means respecting other people's right to hold their beliefs. As Steyn (2004, p. ix) observes, learners "should be able to empathise with the other … and have some idea of what it means to be, for instance, a devout Africanist, Christian, Jew, or humanist." From this perspective, RE can provide opportunities for learners "to gain educational benefit from the study of religion" (Hull, 2007, p. 4).

Furthermore, the non-confessional approach resonates with Grimmitt's (2000) learning-about-religion and learning-from-religion approaches. The learning-about-religion approach is descriptive and historical in nature and is against mono-faith RE. As Hull (2007, p. 3) observes, it

> is often motivated by the desire to create a purely educational form of religious education, one which will not be open to the charge of indoctrinating or giving an unfair advantage to any particular religion.

One point to note here is that the dual-mode RE curriculum accommodates two contradictory spaces: the mono-faith space and the multi-faith space. The mono-faith space can be described as confessional while the multi-faith space can be described as non-confessional. Thus, although the mono-faith space in the dual-mode RE curriculum may not be charged of indoctrination, it can be criticised for giving an unfair advantage to Christianity over Islam and African Tradition Religions. This is because while Christianity is covered exclusively in the mono-faith space, it also shares the multi-faith space alongside Islam and African Traditional Religions.

The next sub-section uses the notion of desacrilisation as its lens to theorise the ideological underpinnings informing the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

8.2.2.1 Desacrilisation of Religious Education

The term desacrilisation is used by Haralambos and Holborn (1991) to describe the declining influence of the sacred in contemporary life of western societies. It is another term for secularisation which refers "to the weakening or even disappearance of religion" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991, p. 679) and its influence in society. For Giddens (1993, p. 486) secularisation "describes the process whereby religion loses its influence over the various spheres of social life." It is the opposite of what Peter and Berger (1999) describe as the desecularization of the world, referring to the increasing religious influence over the public and privates spheres of life in society.

The notion of secularisation is not without debate. For instance, August Comte (1986) believed that human history would pass through three epochs, each marked by a different set of intellectual beliefs. The first epoch would be a theological phase in which religious and superstitious beliefs would be dominant. The second epoch would be a metaphysical phase in which philosophy would become dominant, weakening the hold of religious and superstitious beliefs on society. And the third epoch would be a positive phase in which science alone would dominate human thinking and direct human behaviour, leading to the disappearance of religious influence altogether (Comte, 1986). Thus, for Comte secularisation would imply replacing the role of religion with that of science in society (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991).

On the other hand, Durkheim (1961) observed that there was something eternal in religion. As such, religion would not become obsolete with changing times, though its social significance would decline. In an industrial society where there was a highly specialised division of labour, religion would lose some of its importance as a force for integrating society. Weber (1963) also anticipated a progressive decline of the importance

of religion in society because rationalisation would gradually erode religious influence, leading to its eventual disappearance. Another observation, on the contrary, is that religion still continues to be influential in the lives of many people in contemporary society despite demographic changes with regard to religious attendance, membership, and ritual observation (Martin, 1978; Wilson, 1966, 1976, 1982).

In this study the expression desacrilisation or secularisation of RE is used to theorise the change in the conception of RE as a subject involved with the promotion of faith among learners to a subject involved with the promotion of critical thinking, knowledge and understanding about religion. The shift from confessional to non-confessional RE can be theorised as a reflection of desacrilisation or secularisation of RE. Conversion and promotion of faith are some of the major features of confessional not non-confessional RE (Grimmitt, 2000a; Hull, 2007; Wood, 1984). In this sense, people contesting non-confessional RE, are in effect, contesting desacrilisation of RE.

The understandings by the Christian faith-communities were largely against the secularisation of RE. For them, RE should lead to conversion of learners. For instance, contestation against desacrilisation of RE was expressed by FC-2 as follows:

[FC-2] does not accept the pedagogical approach that only imparts knowledge without conversion. To [FC-2] conversion and teaching are complementary.

Thus, the existence of the mono-faith and multi-faith space in the dual-mode RE curriculum can be understood as an attempt to accommodate the confessional and non-confessional ideologies about RE at the same time. The multi-faith space attempts to promote secularisation of RE while the mono-faith space attempts to continue with teaching religion as a sacred activity or 'sacrilisation' of RE. The contesting spaces in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders portrayed the dual-mode RE curriculum either as an asset or liability. In doing so, they largely normalised its dual-nature (duality) without problematising its educational contradictions for RE in public schools.

The notion of policy carrying different meanings for different people is used, in the next section, to theorise the various nuances in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

8.3   Policy Change Carrying Different Meanings for Different Players

As one way of unmasking the ideological underpinnings of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, I have drawn on the notion that policy carries different meanings for different players in society, from the point of conception to the point of implementation and practice (Ball, 1993; Odden, 1991). The claim is that the different meanings of the dual-mode RE were underpinned by some ideological assumptions and reflected politics of the school curriculum. Thus, for the Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, the policy had different meanings. Such meanings reflected differences in aims, interests and desires with regard to RE in public schools. Furthermore, although the policy change was understood as an asset and/or a liability, there were differences even within each category of understandings. However, the essence of the understandings failed to interrogate the ontological, epistemological, and methodological contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum.

One point to note here is that while the understandings reflected contesting spaces and politics of the school curriculum, they illuminated disagreements about the perceived value of the policy change. A comparison of the understandings reflects the nuances among the three categories of the research participants.[104]

In general, on the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as an asset, as discussed in Chapter Six, the essence of the contesting spaces reflected different issues of emphasis but fell short of challenging the theory and educational contradictions embedded in the curriculum. Firstly, for the Ministry of Education officials, the policy change was understood as good for Malawi's democracy and religious diversity as well as meeting Malawi's academic needs and political vision of maintaining peace and unity among

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[104] See Final Thematic Map in Appendix 7B

people. It can be argued here that, apparently, the curriculum's value was presented in a way that attempted to justify and legitimate the dual-mode RE curriculum in the context of Malawi.

Secondly, for the head teachers, the policy change was understood as promoting social cohesion, civil toleration of differences, cultural and religious literacy, and moral development, as well as broadening the learners' cognitive horizons. The observation here is that the head teachers were preoccupied with representing the educational value of the curriculum for learners and Malawi.

Thirdly, for the faith-community leaders, the policy change was understood as having the potential to promote the values of democracy and religious diversity while broadening the learners' worldview. It was also viewed as promoting civil toleration of differences and serving as a curriculum compromise between the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. The claim here is that the value was presented in a way that justified the inclusion of mono-faith and multi-faith RE in the curriculum.

Furthermore, on the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as a liability[105], the essence of the contesting spaces also foregrounded certain concerns without questioning the theory and educational contradictions of the curriculum. Commenting on how the role of RE in public schools is perceived, ter Haar (1990, p. 131) observes that RE in school "remains a matter of concern to Churches as well as to the national governments albeit for different reasons and in different ways."

In the case of this study and for The Ministry of Education officials, the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was negated for a variety of reasons. One reason given was that there was inadequate preparation for curriculum implementation. The optionality of the curriculum together with curriculum implementation challenges were also articulated as some of the reasons. Lastly, the mixed reactions which the curriculum policy change got from the society was also cited as one the concerns. It is observed that their

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[105] As discussed in Chapter Seven

preoccupation was to show the difficulty of getting policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice.

Secondly, for the head teachers, the policy's value was negated because of various reasons. The first was that it was hastily introduced without adequate preparation. The second was it was a source of additional problems for the schools while the third reason was that the policy was doing learners more harm than good. The fourth reason was that it was politicised by stakeholders. Lastly the policy was negated on the premise that it had several curriculum implementation problems. The argument is that, apparently, the head teachers were preoccupied with the practicality of the curriculum at school level, and a result, they tended to foreground the challenges of policy implementation.

Thirdly, for the faith-community leaders, the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy was negated for a wide range of reasons. One reason given was that there was lack of curriculum consultation. Politicisation of the curriculum was another reason given. The curriculum's negative impact on learners' moral development was also foregrounded as well as lack of curriculum implementation support. Furthermore, tension between secular and sacred conception of RE was also highlighted. Lastly, another reason was that the policy neglected Malawi's history of education, with regard to RE and the purpose for which it was introduced by the Christian missionaries. Apparently, the faith-communities' concern was with the use of the school curriculum as a space for the propagation of knowledge about their respective religions among the learners.

One insight was that for The Ministry of Education officials, the understandings were more concerned with issues affecting the process of legitimating and getting the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice at school level. As Darling-Hammond (1998) observes, it is difficult to bring policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice. The perceived value of the curriculum was couched in the discourse of policy-makers attempting to justify curriculum policy change. On the other hand, negating factors were couched in a discourse, articulating the difficulty of getting any policy change beyond bureaucracy.

For the head teachers, the policy was understood either as an asset or liability but underpinned by practical concerns of implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum at school level. Thus, as leaders in making curriculum decisions at school level, they articulated factors justifying the change as asset and those affecting its implementation at school level. The positive factors articulated the perceived value of the curriculum in relation to the national goals of education in Malawi. On the other hand, the negative factors reflected how the policy had affected the head teachers' obligations of leading and guiding curriculum decisions and choices at school level.

For the faith-community leaders, the understandings reflected the interface between public theology and RE curriculum policy for public schools. On the basis of their public theology of religions - that is the way their religion views and teaches about other religions - the faith-communities were either willing or unwilling to reconceptualise RE in a way that responded to Malawi's democratic and religiously diverse society.

In a democracy, it is not expected that one religion suppress other religions. Where the society is religiously diverse, it becomes critical to open the curriculum space to reflect that religious diversity. As de Gruchy (2007) observes, good practice in public theology and in a democratic society requires promoting the common good by witnessing to the core values rather than seeking privilege for a particular religion. However, the faith-communities' understandings tended be couched in the discourse of public theology that sought to privilege one faith-community in their quest for the transmission and propagation of their faith among learners. It reflected their preoccupation with spreading knowledge and understanding about their respective religions.

The next section employs the concept of hegemony to theorise some contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

8.4   Hegemony in the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum

The contention here is that at an ideological level, hegemony was reflected in the contesting spaces in curriculum policy change as a dimension of politics of the school curriculum. Various social actors perceived the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum

policy change differently. Such differences were informed by competing and often conflicting ideologies about RE, which can influence the conduct of education in the school (Glatthorn et al., 2006; Kelly, 1999). From a deconstructive perspective, unmasking the competing ideologies can illuminate hegemony in the dual-mode RE curriculum as well as politics of the school curriculum.

The core argument here is that hegemony was especially reflected in the understandings by the Christian faith-community leaders who were not happy with the introduction of other faiths in the RE curriculum. Historically only the Christian faith had been taught in Malawi from the time the missionaries introduced western formal education in the 1870s up to the late 1980s (See Chapter Two). The RME syllabus, as a multi-faith syllabus, was perceived as an affront on the hegemony of Christianity in RE. For instance, one faith-community (FC-2) is on record, in the minutes of the first national consultative meeting, in 2000, to have said:

[FC-2] suspects RME is bent to promote certain religious beliefs. [FC-2] wonders why RME should replace a syllabus that serves the interests of people best. Churches establish schools to teach the Bible and therefore, the Bible cannot just be replaced anyhow. African Traditional Religion is okay for those who have grounds for it, but for [FC-2] it is irrelevant. …[FC-2] does not accept the pedagogical approach that only imparts knowledge without conversion. To [FC-2] conversion and teaching are complementary.

The above suspicion reflected the desire to dominate other faiths in the RE curriculum on the basis of the history of education in Malawi. It also illuminated the conception of RE as a tool for evangelisation.

Furthermore, an attempt to use history of education in Malawi to maintain hegemony of the Christian faith in the RE curriculum was expressed by FC-4:

Well, I think we have to follow the historicity of education in Malawi to say that before government intervention, education was actually introduced as a means of converting the people to Christianity. So to [our faith community] that was the primary reason for introducing education. It was to assist [us] to evangelise. (Interview, FC-4).

The contention here is that the insistence and desire that only BK should be taught is hegemonic in itself. As observed by Slattery (2006), when a singular historical view dominates the cultural context and other historical views, it results in hegemony. Therefore, the use of the history of education in Malawi to justify the domination of the Christian faith in the RE curriculum was a form of hegemony. As discussed in Chapter Four, hegemony refers to maintaining domination by force or persuasion (McLaren, 1998; Slattery, 2006).

The argument here is that in the case of the history of RE in Malawi, the exclusion of the other faiths in the curriculum space meant the monopoly of RE by the Christian faith. Such monopoly reflected a case of hegemony, with the Christian faith in domination. As argued in Chapter Four, such hegemony had negative social impact on members of those religions excluded from the school curriculum. Members of Islam were badly negatively affected by that hegemony and as testified by FC-2:

Now… in this country, Muslims were not sending their children to Christian schools. And apparently, since they didn't have their schools in the past, Muslims lagged behind in education, mostly those who were very strict and did not want their children to go to Christian schools. What they were running away from was Bible Knowledge. Because schools mostly were by missionaries whose aims were to use the schools as a tool for evangelisation. So that too had an impact. Now, if it is open, may be, all religions will be freer (Interview, FC-2).

Gramsci (1971) observes that hegemony of one group can be maintained by making concessions to the dominated groups. The contention here is that the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum was an attempt to make such concessions. It reserved a privileged space for the Christian faith through BK as a mono-faith syllabus and made concessions to other faiths through RME as a multi-faith syllabus. This concession-making resonates with the notion that hegemony "undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised are taken into account" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991, p. 156). As Gramsci (1971) argues, the dominant group has to make concessions in order to be able to maintain dominance by consent instead of relying on the use of force.

Thus, the adoption of the dual-mode RE curriculum privileged the Christian-faith communities because BK is exclusively a discursive and curriculum space for the Christian faith. On the other hand, RME provided a space where concessions to the dominated faiths were made. RME accommodated Christianity alongside Islam and African Traditional Religions. As such, it was a form of concession made for Islam and African Tradition Religions.

The claim here is that the inclusion of the other religions in the RE curriculum served to make members of the dominated religions feel considered. To that extent, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change can be perceived as making concession to and benefiting the dominated faith-communities in Malawi. Through such concessions, hegemony of the Christian faith is maintained.

For the Muslim faith-community, there was an apparent support for the adoption of the multi-faith approach. This support could better be understood against the history of education in Malawi. The multi-faith approach meant that for the first time in the history of RE in Malawi, Islam was included in the public school curriculum. It represented an end of Christian monopoly of the RE curriculum; an end of the hegemony of the Christian faith in RE curriculum theory and practice.

Thus, it can be argued that, in a sense, the Christian faith-communities negated the dual-mode RE curriculum partly because of its diminution of the curriculum space, which, hitherto, was the monopoly of the Christian faith. One the other hand, the Muslim faith-community partly negated the curriculum for giving the Christian faith an edge over other religions. The curriculum gave the Christian faith double-syllabus coverage, through BK and RME; through the mono-faith and multi-faith RE space.

By failing to problematise continued hegemony in the dual-mode RE curriculum, the various understandings, indirectly, legitimated inequality in RE curriculum theory and practice. Bowels and Gintis (1976) have commented on the role of the education system in legitimating inequality especially in a capitalist society, through the hidden curriculum. The logic of their argument can apply here. The adoption of the dual-mode RE

curriculum legitimated inequality in RE by privileging one religion against other religions in Malawi. Thus, it normalised inequality in RE curriculum space for Christianity relative to other religions. Furthermore, McLaren's (1998) notion of hegemony as "indoctrination and manipulation" as cited by Slattery (2006, p. 38), can be used here to theorise the Christian faith-communities' contestation of the shift from confessional to non-confessional RE, from mono-faith to multi-faith RE. That contestation was probably informed by a theology of exclusivism. The desire was, perhaps, to convert learners, through indoctrination and manipulation, into one religious worldview - Christianity. Thus, indoctrination and manipulation can influence RE curriculum theory and practice when some dominant groups reject opening-up the school curriculum space to other religions.

The next section unmasks the privileged space in the dual-mode RE curriculum.

8.4.1   The Privileged Space in the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum

A deconstructive perspective can also help to illuminate the silence on the privileged space for the Christian faith in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum. The contention here is that much as the curriculum was credited for providing a win-win situation between the Christian and Muslim faith-communities, it privileged the Christian faith against other faiths. The curriculum created an unacknowledged privileged-space for Christianity. This is because in both the mono-faith and multi-faith space Christianity is covered. In the mono-faith space, the Bible as the scripture for Christianity enjoys monopoly through the BK syllabus. In the multi-faith space, Christianity is also one of the three religions covered in the RME syllabus. It is argued here that this privileging resonates with ter Haar's (1990, p. 131) observation that:

> Although the Christian tradition is still very strong in most state schools, there is no doubt a clear move towards more objectivity with equal respect for other religious traditions. This affects the status of African Traditional Religions as well as Islam. The non-Christian religions have definitely gained importance in religious education curriculum but it is equally true that they still find themselves in a process of emancipation.

The above observation should be understood against Malawi's history of education. From the late 1980s and for the first time, multi-faith RE was introduced to accommodate Islam and African Traditional Religions in the school curriculum.

A further contention is that privileging Christianity in the curriculum negated or minimised its value in line with the ethos of democracy and social justice. In the context where public schools serve learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds, the RE curriculum should not be seen to privilege any one religious tradition in society. Here Habermas (2008, p. 101) that such privileging "would spell trouble for the modern state committed to neutrality toward competing worldviews due to the fact of pluralism". As such, any privileging should be deconstructed to reflect pluralism (Rawls, 1993). The understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change did not problematise this privileging. It can be argued that the privileged space and the apparent silence on it were suggestive of some form of hegemony.

In the discourse of power, all teaching and learning spaces are conceived as being "shaped within relations of power - where the power of some is connected to the relative powerlessness of others" (Seddon, Billet, & Clemans, 2004, p. 124). Thus, the privileged space for Christianity could probably be a reflection of the position of power occupied by the Christian faith relative to the position of powerlessness by other faiths in Malawi. From this perspective, the existence of BK and RME in the dual-mode RE could reflect the struggle for power by people of different faith persuasions.

In addition, statistics on what decisions schools were making in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum showed that more schools preferred BK to RME. For instance, out of 53 head teachers of schools offering RE, 35(66%) said they were offering BK only. 16(30%) head teachers said were offering BK and RME while 2(4%) said were offering RME only.[106]. From these statistics, one can argue that a privileged space was reflected even in the way schools were making decisions in offering RE. That privileged space allowed for continued hegemony of Christianity over other religions, contrary to the claim that the dual-mode RE curriculum was for social cohesion.

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[106] See Appendix 8: Table A8.5

One point to note here is that from a deconstructive perspective, there is need for RE that promotes constructive dialogue across difference. This is imperative in a religiously diverse society, espousing the principles of democracy and social justice. It requires an integration of perspectives in negotiating for curriculum policy change with stakeholders to promote an alternative vision of RE curriculum theory and practice. That vision should be life-affirming and democratic in response to our current problems and beyond. In the context of our contemporary and ever-increasing plurality, RE curriculum theory and practice should value diversity and encourage a wide variety of content, methods, applications and practices. Unfortunately, some ideological positions have worked to hamper such a paradigm shift in the conception of RE in Malawi. This was evident in the contesting spaces reflected in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum. In addition, the dual-mode RE curriculum can be described as an epitome of contestation around such a paradigm shift.

Furthermore, the privileged space for the Christian faith in the dual-mode RE curriculum could be seen as a form of discrimination of otherness in education. Thus, privileging one religion over other religions in the academy and society must be deconstructed to shape and reshape alliances for constructing RE curriculum space in which critical knowledge and understanding about people of diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds can thrive. The reconceptualisation of RE should be part of an overall human project, witnessing to the core values of humanity (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). It should be committed to building alliances for justice and constructing circumstances in which diverse human beings can thrive. This should be pursued while remaining aware that there are deeply entrenched and sedimented structures working against such alliances. The common ground for all curriculum theory and practice should be to address the inequalities and injustices that plague our schools and society (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004).

The next section presents some emerging theorising strands leading into theory building in Chapter Nine.

8.4.2   Emerging Theorising Strands

This section summarises the main emerging theorising strands that lead into theory building in the last chapter of the study. To that effect, a synthesis, of the strands of opportunities and the threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum (as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven), is presented here. On the one hand, it can be argued that, in terms of opportunities, the policy change was firstly an opportunity for The Ministry of Education to attempt to promote democracy and human rights through the teaching of RE in schools. Secondly, it was an opportunity for the schools in their attempts to promote civil cohesion and religion literacy as part of the national goals of education in Malawi. Thirdly, the policy was an opportunity to promote religious diversity for the faith-communities.

On the other hand, the contested space provided by the dual-mode RE curriculum can be perceived as a threatening space. Firstly, it was a threat because it exposed The Ministry of Education's lack of adequate preparation for the introduction of its new RE curriculum vision. Secondly, the policy's hasty implementation, with inadequate preparation, was also a threat to schools' normal operations. And thirdly, for the faith-communities, the lack of proper and extensive consultation process for curriculum change was a threat.

A summary of this chapter is presented in the next section.

8.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter has employed a deconstructive perspective to unmask some ideological assumptions underpinning the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. An analytical framework, comprising the concepts of ideology, public theology of religions, confessional and non-confessional RE, and hegemony, has been used to theorise the assumptions. Its substantive argument is that the differences and disagreements in the understandings reflected contesting spaces in curriculum policy change and politics of the school curriculum. In turn, such contesting spaces represented

some "assumed educational, theoretical or moral superiority of particular worldviews or dominant paradigms in educational research and practice" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 37).

To crown the theorisation of the study, I present my thesis, possible areas for further study, and concluding reflections in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Nine

Toward a Synthetical and Integrated Interpretation: Thesis and Concluding Reflections

Philosophy is a way of thinking, it is concerned with having good reasons for your beliefs and not about the beliefs themselves.[107]

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I draw on insights from the research findings analysed and discussed in this study to postulate the thesis and conclusions of the study. Firstly I state the thesis of the study as my philosophy about the perceived and real value of a curriculum, using contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum for secondary in Malawi. From Chapter One through to Chapter Eight, I have presented my way of thinking, beliefs and the reasons for my beliefs (King, 2004), as a premise for the thesis. Secondly, I conclude the study while heeding Cary's (2006, p. xi) observation that historically, "moves and countermoves to define curriculum have occurred within highly contested terrain". This contestation is, among other factors, because of competing ideologies about what education should be in schools. Thus, the different contesting spaces should be seen as a reflection of the contested terrain of curriculum theory and practice in general (Apple, 2004; Cary, 2006).

Given such a contested terrain, I am mindful that the thesis and conclusions presented here are likely to be contested. As such, they are not aimed at achieving consensus and convergence of interpretation in RE curriculum theory and practice. Rather, the intention is to illuminate contesting spaces in curriculum policy change as aspects of politics of the school curriculum. Counter-arguments to the thesis and conclusions are, therefore, inevitable. They are welcome and should be seen as a characteristic reflection of the highly contested terrain of curriculum theory and practice.

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[107] King, 2004, p. 9

The presentation is organised into three sections. The first part postulates the thesis of the study. The second section synthesises and integrates politics of the school curriculum. While the third section presents recommendations and areas for further study, the fourth section discusses concluding reflections of the study.

In the next section, I present the thesis of the study.

9.2　The Curriculum's Perceived Educational Value Overshadowing Its Educational Contradictions and Supposedly 'Real' Value

Under this section, I postulate the thesis to crown the theorising of the study. The findings of this phenomenological study have indicated that the essence of the contesting spaces in the various understandings by the research participants portrayed the opportunities as well as the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. In both cases, the contesting spaces foregrounded the educational value of the curriculum policy change without articulating its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value. The perceived positive and negative educational value of the curriculum was foregrounded to the point of masking its educational contradictions and political value. The claim here is that such masking was not deliberate but inadvertent. Thus, the whole thesis is premised on that silence by the research participants in their understandings regarding the value of the dual-mode RE curriculum.[108]

I contend that the understandings, by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders, foregrounded the perceived educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum but probably and inadvertently masked its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value.

My thesis is that the perceived value of a curriculum may overshadow its educational contradictions and supposedly 'real' value. In the case of this study, the perceived educational value of the dual-mode RE curriculum overshadowed not only its educational contradictions but also its 'real' value, which is political; serving to accommodate the competing demands for RE by the Christian and Muslim faith-communities. However,

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[108] See Chapters Six and Seven

while it has been argued in this study that the contesting spaces, reflected in the understandings, manifested politics of the school curriculum, the emphasis on the curriculum's perceived educational value tended to overshadow its political value.

A critical examination of the dual-mode RE curriculum has unmasked the ontological, epistemological, and methodological contradictions embedded in its dual-nature: the mono-faith and multi-faith space. It has been contended that such contradictions negate or minimise its perceived educational value. From this perspective, its curriculum value can be justified more on political than educational grounds. It provides a *modus vivendi* for people with two different conceptions of RE. It accommodates the Christian and Muslim faith-communities' different demands for mono-faith and multi-faith RE respectively.

Thus, the study argues that the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders largely failed to articulate its contradictions and political value. To that extent, the curriculum's perceived educational value tended to overshadow its political value and educational contradictions. Genealogy of RE curriculum in Malawi reveals that informing that overshadowing was the history of education in Malawi. It was the fact that education was introduced by the Christian faith-communities that tended to legitimate the privileged space for the Christian faith in the RE curriculum. In this sense, RE curriculum theory and practice in Malawi could be perceived as suffering from the shackles of history of education.

Informed by the history of education in Malawi, an attempt to align a political vision of accommodating conflicting demands was made at the cost of embracing two contradictory RE spaces. Thus, probably and unintentionally, the curriculum's perceived value overshadowed its supposedly 'real' value, which is more political than educational, given its educational contradictions. In a sense, it was a politically-correct curriculum, maintaining peace and unity among people with different and competing demands for RE. But this was done at the cost of creating educational ambiguity about the role of RE in public schools.

The contention here is that the contradictory spaces in the dual-mode RE curriculum do not render the curriculum policy change beneficial on educational grounds. Instead, they create educational contradictions about the nature and role of RE in public schools. Thus, the curriculum can be seen as an example of government's attempt to align national curriculum to the political vision of maintaining peace and unity in a country, but at a cost of creating educational contradictions. All the understandings portraying the opportunities as well as the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum did not foreground this political value. The argument here is that while the political vision of maintaining peace and unity was achieved, the created educational contradictions negated or minimised the curriculum's potential and value of developing a citizenry with a capacity to celebrate religious differences through one RE curriculum space.

Thus, in the short-term, the dual-mode RE curriculum may seem valuable and providing a win-win situation for the people with different demands for RE. In the long-run, however, this curriculum can be seen as a recipe for social division in a society that is religiously diverse. It reflects failure to come up with one space of RE that should promote social cohesion and dialogue across difference. The existence of the mono-faith and multi-faith space promotes contradictory ontology, epistemology and methodology of RE, making different contributions to the national goals of education.

The argument here is that the curriculum's educational contradictions have the effect of creating educational ambiguity about the role of RE in public schools. Such ambiguity illustrates one conundrum faced in education policy-making. That is, the political context creates pressure to make curriculum policies that work against the attainment of some of the national goals of education. In an effort to have a politically correct curriculum, policy-makers may end up with a policy that promotes educational contradictions. This is the case with the dual-mode RE curriculum policy. It is also possible for such contradictions to go unnoticed or without being criticised in the name of political correctness.

Table 9.1 attempts to summarise the main aspects of the thesis postulated here.

Table 9.1: The Perceived Educational Value and the Supposedly 'Real' Value of the

Dual-Mode RE Curriculum

The Value of the Dual-Mode RE Curriculum	
' Perceived' educational value of the curriculum • Good for Malawi's national goals of education, democracy, constitution and social cohesion	**'Supposedly real' (political) value of the curriculum** • Creating a win-win situation between Christian and Muslim faith-communities in the short-run.
Effects of the perceived educational value • Masking the educational contradictions and political value of the dual-mode RE curriculum • Dual-mode RE curriculum failing to promote citizenry with capacity to celebrate religious difference through one RE curriculum space.	**Effects of the supposedly real (political) value** • Creating educational contradictions due to mono-faith and multi-faith space of the dual-mode RE curriculum. • Dual-mode maintaining peace and unity among people with different demands for RE at a cost of educational contradictions. • Recipe for social division in the long-run

In keeping with the key research question,[109] the next section theorises the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.

9.3   The Essence of the Contesting Spaces in the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change

An integration and synthesis of the essence of the contesting spaces regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change are presented under this section. This is done by

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[109] As stated in Chapter One, Section 1.6

foregrounding the notions of governmentality, contradictory curriculum spaces, and theoretical posturing of the policy change. The substantive claim is that, phenomenologically, the essence of the various contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change reflected politics of the school curriculum. Through such politics, the curriculum's perceived value masked its educational contradictions and supposedly real (political) value. In this study, the contesting spaces have been represented in two thematic categories: positive and negative categories, portraying the opportunities as well as the weaknesses and/or threats of the dual-mode RE curriculum for Malawi.[110]

Thus, in essence, the focus on the curriculum's value overshadowed other curriculum considerations. Among such considerations was the issue of how the dual-nature of the curriculum could be a recipe for social division in long run.[111]

The next section theorises governmentality with regard to the dual-mode RE curriculum.

9.3.1   Governmentality of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum

Under this section, I argue that governmentality plays out in different ways. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Foucauldian notion of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) refers to a "form of activity aimed to guide and shape conduct" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 25) while for Gordon (1991, p. 2) it is the "conduct of conduct". For this study, governmentality has been used to describe the activity of formulating and implementing policy to guide and shape the conduct of education in the school, and as contested or supported by various stakeholders in society. The various contesting spaces regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum reflect the ways in which the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was valued and understood by the research participants.

The study was premised on the following key research question: What was the essence of the contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, using the perspectives of Ministry of

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[110] As represented in Chapters Six and Seven respectively
[111] This is discussed in subsection 9.3.2

Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities? One thread running through the findings has indicated that the essence of the contesting spaces foregrounded contestation of governmentality of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The essence reflected contestation of the formulation and implementatation of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy. Some understandings attributed value to policy change while others negated or minimised its value. This pattern was noticed across the three categories of the research participants: The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders. The substantive claim is that such contesting spaces, as disagreements about the governmentality of RE in Malawi, reflected some dynamics of politics of the school curriculum, rendering the dual-mode RE curriculum a contested terrain. However, the primary concern was different from one category of the research participants to another, reflecting how governmentality plays out in different ways.

Firstly, the primary concern of The Ministry of Education officials was how to legitimate the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change and get it beyond bureaucracy into practice. Their positive understandings foregrounded the policy's educational value as way of portraying it as an asset for Malawi. Apparently, the intention was to persuade people to see the curriculum as beneficial. On the other hand, their negative understandings focused on factors hampering the process of getting the policy change beyond bureaucracy.

Secondly, the secondary school head teachers' positive understandings primarily focused on the academic value of the curriculum for the learners and Malawi. Apparently, the intention was probably to justify the curriculum on academic grounds. On the other hand, the negative understandings pointed out the adverse effects of the dual-mode RE curriculum on the learners, in particular, and the school administration as a whole.

Thirdly, the faith-communities' understandings seemed to be primarily concerned with justifying the dual-mode RE curriculum as a space for the promotion of knowledge and understanding about their respective religions or faiths. The history of education in Malawi was used to justify that conception of RE. The policy's value was portrayed

positively or negatively depending on whether the curriculum was perceived as providing that space or not.

The next section theorises the dual-mode RE curriculum as a curriculum with two contradictory spaces.

9.3.2   The Contradictory Curriculum Spaces of the Dual-Mode Religious Education

Furthermore, the findings have also indicated that the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was introduced as a compromise between competing ideologies about RE. The Christian faith-communities supported mono-faith RE while the government and Muslim-faith community were in favour of multi-faith RE. Thus, while it is the mandate of government to formulate and implement curriculum policy change, the formulated policy is subject to contestation by social actors (Apple, 2004; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). The policy was introduced against a background where a confessional and mono-faith approach to RE had monopolised the curriculum space in schools. It informed RE curriculum theory and practice from the time the Christian missionaries introduced formal western education in the 1870s to the late 1980s when Malawi started adopting a multi-faith and non-confessional approach.

The dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in 2001 was introduced within Malawi's changing socio-political context characterised by religious diversity and emerging democracy. That socio-political context created demands on curriculum policy-makers to reconceptualise RE suitable for such a society. The substantive claim made here is that the different contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum were contextually determined. They reflected how a curriculum might be subject to different interpretations by different people in society.

Within Malawi's context, the dual-mode RE curriculum can be theorised as an attempt by the government to provide a win-win situation for both Christian and Muslim faith-communities. Despite such an attempt, the curriculum still privileges the Christian faith. This is because the Bible as the scripture of the Christian faith is exclusively covered in

the mono-faith syllabus of BK. At the same time, Christianity is also included in the multi-faith syllabus of RME, alongside Islam and African Traditional Religions.

To that extent, the curriculum has apparently accommodated the competing demands for RE, in the short-run, thereby maintaining peace and unity among the competing faith-communities. In the long-run, however, the policy can be seen as a recipe for social division, promoting a fractured curriculum. Firstly, it reflects failure to have a curriculum without educational contradictions by privileging one religion over other religions. Secondly, it promotes a form of hegemony in the school curriculum where Christianity dominates the curriculum space. As such, the curriculum's potential to develop a citizenry that can thrive on life skills of civil toleration of differences, mutual appreciation and celebration of each other's differences, is negated. Yet these are necessary life skills in a religiously diverse and pluralistic society. With such contradictions and privileging, it is hard for the dual-mode RE curriculum to promote dialogue across difference. As such, its contribution to curbing bigotry and prejudice is compromised.

In the next section, I synthesise the theoretical posturing of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change in the light of its oppositional curriculum spaces - the BK and RME syllabi.

9.3.3   Theoretical Posturing of the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change

The research findings have indicated lack of a clear articulation of a theory of education underpinning the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. For one thing, its educational contradictions render the curriculum ambiguous in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology of RE. As such, it is not clear as to what it seeks to achieve at the level of education through its mono-faith and multi-faith space of RE. As Fullan (1993) puts it, any education reform must state clearly what it seeks to achieve at the level of education in terms of theory and practice. The contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum did not clearly interrogate and problematise its educational theory. Except for its perceived educational value and masked political value, its

educational theory was ambiguous. This ambiguity has been theorised from three perspectives: ontological, epistemological, and methodological.

Ontologically, the curriculum embraces two contradictory conceptions about the nature of RE. In the mono-faith space, RE is based on one religion while in the multi-faith space RE is based on many religions. The ontological opposition between BK and RME syllabuses was not articulated in the understandings by the Ministry of Education officials, head teachers, and faith-community leaders.

Epistemologically, the dual-mode RE curriculum promotes two contradictory ways of acquiring knowledge about religion. In the mono-faith space, it is only knowledge and understanding of one religion while in the multi-faith space, it is knowledge and understanding of many religions.

Methodologically, the curriculum promotes two oppositional approaches to the teaching of religion in schools. In the mono-faith space, the approach is closed and limited to one religion while in the multi-faith space it is open and free to relate and compare religions. Multi-faith RE has the potential to promote dialogue across difference while mono-faith RE promotes exclusivism in knowledge and understanding about religion.

The claim here is that all the data sets from the three groups of research participants supported or contested the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change on educational grounds, though with different nuances, without problematising or acknowledging its ontological, epistemological, and methodological contradictions. Even the view that the curriculum is apparently more political than educational was not articulated.

The next section offers some recommendations and possible areas for further study.

9.4 Recommendations and Possible Areas for Further Study

Under this section, I make some recommendations and suggest some areas for further study based largely on the methodological limitations of the study. Firstly, the sample of the study was limited to the elite research participants within the categories of The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and leaders of the

nationally organised faith-communities. There is silence, therefore, on the voices of other stakeholders in education such as parents, RE teachers, and learners themselves. Thus, these voices are possible areas for further study on the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum.

Secondly, the category of leaders of faith-communities was dominated by leaders of Christian faith-communities with one Muslim faith-community and no leaders representing African Traditional Religions (ATRs). It has been explained that this was largely because of the criteria employed in selecting the faith-communities whose leaders were requested to participate in the study (see Chapter Five, Section 5.3.2). Because ATR in Malawi does not have a nationally orgnaised body, with a national coordinating office, representing its members, it was not possible to include them in the sample. There is therefore need for study on the standing of ATR in the midst of converting and nationally organised religions such as Christianity and Islam. The voices of members of ATR should also be heard in matters of RE curriculum. Its inextricable association with traditional culture also needs problematisation, given that some of the traditional cultural beliefs and practices are also embraced by Christian and Muslim members. The role of ATR in the context of the RE curriculum is one possible area of further inquiry.

Another possible area for further inquiry could be the personal religious convictions of The Ministry of Education officials and head teachers and their influence on RE curriculum policy and practice. This could extend to the personal religious convictions of parents, teachers and learners as well.

One recommendation could be that a need for reconceptualising RE in Malawi becomes more critical in the context of the educational contradictions embedded in the dual-mode RE curriculum and lack of awareness of such contradictions. The reconceptualisation should be based on theoretical constructions with the potential to translate curriculum policy into concrete educational actions at school without educational contradictions and in a manner that promotes, not minimises, the set national goals of education. Such a curriculum should not accommodate contradictory spaces.

Another recommendation here is that there is a need also to acknowledge that in any curriculum, some bodies, actions, beliefs, values, and experiences are legitimised as normal and acceptable, and others as abnormal, deviant and unacceptable (Cary, 2006). The Christian faith-communities' contestation of the multi-faith curriculum can be seen as a form of legitimizing mono-faith against multi-faith RE. Thus, there is need to reconceptualise the RE curriculum as a space that thrives on the different religions or faiths. With that view, a multi-faith curriculum can be negotiated while looking out for any inclination toward discrimination on the basis of differences between religions. The reconceptualisation should be driven by the need to help people change their expectations of RE in public schools. It should aim at preparing learners for a diverse array of contexts, both global and local. To that effect, the value of RE should be judged on how well it prepares learners for a world that has become interconnected, pluralistic and is increasingly espousing a democratic ethos.

Furthermore, any form of exclusivism in RE should be problematised as a structural barrier in society in the teaching of religion in schools and a reflection of politics of the school curriculum. The claim here is that barriers to multi-faith RE curriculum render hollow the whole rhetoric of the national goals of education in Malawi, aiming at promoting in learners citizenship, ethical and socio-cultural skills suitable for a democratic and pluralistic society. The theoretical and practical implications of the dual-mode RE mismatch the rhetoric about promoting in learners skills such as greater understanding of self and others, values clarification, cultural literacy, and civil toleration of differences. Its educational contradictions fail to free RE from being conceptualised as a religious activity. It also continues to privilege one religion over other religions in the school curriculum. Such privileging reflects hegemony in education which is not a recipe for social cohesion but divisiveness.

In the last section of this chapter, I offer my concluding reflections.

9.5   Concluding Reflections

The interpretation of the phenomenon of curriculum policy change varies according to the situation of the viewer. As such, there is no objective interpretation of curriculum

policy change. Only overlapping and varying accounts of curriculum policy change can be obtained. In this study, such varied interpretations or understandings have been described, analysed, and theorised as politics of the school curriculum. Much of the theory on politics of the school curriculum relates to how different social actors contest, influence, or seek to influence, the conduct of education in the school. However, this study has argued for an extension of this conceptualisation of politics of the school curriculum to include the various interpretations or understandings that people have about the value of a curriculum. At the level of interpretation people differently perceive the value of any curriculum policy change. It is argued here that such varied evaluative perceptions give rise to contesting spaces in curriculum policy change and are a reflection of politics of the school curriculum.

One reflection is that the varied contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change have implications for the negotiation of educational policy with stakeholders. For one thing, there is a need for clarity about the conception of RE curriculum theory and practice in a religiously diverse and pluralistic society. Such clarity can help to resolve the tension between the secular and sacred conception of RE in public education. This study has illuminated such tension as reflected in the varied understandings by the three categories of the research participants.

Another point to note here is that the dual-mode RE curriculum is an example of curriculum policy change with two contradictory spaces. The BK syllabus as mono-faith and RME syllabus as multi-faith represent ontological, epistemological, and methodological contradictions in RE. These contradictions are discursively produced within Malawi's historical and socio-political context. However, they were not interrogated in the varied understandings. The claim is that such contradictions make it easy to describe the value of dual-mode RE curriculum policy change as more political than educational. Nonetheless, the dual-mode RE curriculum can be justified as a response to Malawi's historical and socio-political context.

While responding to the need to provide RE as an educational activity, contributing to Malawi's national goals of education, the curriculum also attempted to provide a win-win

situation between the demands for mono-faith and multi-faith RE. More specifically, the conception of RE as an educational activity was in conflict with the conception of RE as a religious activity (Hull, 1984). Such conflicting conceptions require a paradigm shift in RE curriculum theory and practice. Emphasis should be put on teaching religion in schools as an educational activity, in a manner relevant for a religiously diverse and democratic society. This is important considering that schools serve learners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds.

Moreover, from an advocacy perspective, one can argue that since public theology of religions can influence the conception of RE, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the faith-communities' public theology. The paradigm shift should reflect an understanding that good practice in public theology and in a democratic society requires promoting the common good by witnessing to the core values rather than seeking privilege for one particular religion (de Gruchy, 2007). The faith-communities and other stakeholders in education should, therefore, be committed to building alliances for justice and constructing dialogic space in which knowledge and understanding of diverse faith-traditions can thrive. There should be no attempt at seeking privilege for one faith over other faiths. One can argue here that people influencing the conduct of education in the school should deconstruct their own complicity in the practice of exclusivism in RE and recognise the need to open up new curriculum spaces where dialogue across religious difference can be cultivated.

More specifically, the faith-communities' support for RE seemed to be largely based on one of the following reasons: historical, evangelical, or moral/character development. While these reasons are important in themselves, they would not be sufficient to justify RE in public education where the inclusion of a subject has to be justified on educational grounds (Barrow & Woods 2006; Carr 2005; Hirst, 1974, 1984; Hirst & Peters, 1970). This means that each subject has to contribute in a unique way to the fulfillment of the aims of education.

For Malawi, the national goals of education express the need for all subjects included in the school curriculum to make a unique contribution to the realisation of such goals and

RE is no exception. However, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change (as understood by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders) falls short of making that unique contribution. This is mainly because the RE curriculum is not yet conceptualised only as an educational activity, informed by a non-confessional ideology. Religious and confessional considerations still continue to influence the way RE is understood.

Furthermore, while the view of teaching BK for conversion would be tenable from a perspective of public theology of *exclusivism* and confessional RE, it would be difficult to justify in public education serving a democratic and pluralist society like Malawi. It was for this reason that educators and curriculum policy-makers in the 1980s felt the need for RE curriculum "that would reflect the plural, multi-faith character of Malawian society" (Chidester et al., 1994, p. 85). The presence of BK creates a space of exclusivism in RE in Malawi. In that sense, the dual-mode RE curriculum fails to fully respond to Malawi's pluralistic nature.

Another reflection is that there is a need to think about a new RE curriculum space that addresses the politics of difference, diversity and exclusion in public education. It should promote critical discussion and reflection on matters of religion as a social phenomenon. That critical reflection should consider religious diversity so that the curriculum materials and themes can intersect with the local and global community, social and political issues, as well as the pluralist experiences of our contemporary society. This should be done to advance a robust understanding of justice and unity in diversity.

As such, there is need to find ways around the hegemonic forces and institutional obstacles that limit the development of critical knowledge and understanding of religion as an important dimension of human and social life. The teaching and learning of religion as a religious activity in public education, reinforces prejudices. It also disconnects the understanding of RE from the perspective of a global community with the common objective of promoting the socialisation, individuation, and humanisation of learners, capable of negotiating meaning and promoting dialogue across difference. This need resonates with Wardekker and Miedema's (2007, p. 76) observation that RE "is in need

of a new interpretation and new school practices in order to remain meaningful in our present culture."

Moreover, although the dual-mode RE curriculum is still in its early stages of implementation since its introduction in 2001, some general conclusions can be drawn about its impact on the theory and practice of RE in Malawi. Given the political and social imperatives facing curriculum developers in a democratic, multicultural, and pluralistic society like Malawi, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change was seen as a politically correct approach to take. In the short run, the policy change managed to resolve the controversy that had arisen over the replacement of the mono-faith syllabus of BK with a multi-faith syllabus of RME in 2000. However, in theory as well as practice, the policy has led to progressive exclusivism and hegemony in RE while creating educational contradictions in terms of ontology, epistemology, and methodology of RE.

In addition, the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change illustrates that sometimes curriculum policy change may be justified on grounds that are not educational in intent. One point to note here is that the political realities of the context in which the curriculum is to operate may take an upper hand. For instance, the political need of maintaining peace and unity among the people may play an important role in shaping a curriculum. The dual-mode RE curriculum policy change can be understood from this perspective as an attempt to accommodate the competing demands for mono-faith and multi-faith RE. However, by foregrounding the curriculum's educational value, in terms of opportunities as well as weaknesses and/or threats, the contesting spaces in the understandings by The Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers, and faith-community leaders tended to mask its political value and educational contradictions.

Finally, in a way, the dual-mode RE curriculum seems to acknowledge the religious diversity of Malawi's society and the need for the government to be fair to all faith-communities in RE curriculum theory and practice. Its mono-faith and multi-faith spaces seem to be an attempt to achieve a balance between two different conceptions of RE. In so doing, however, it has only managed to paper over the fundamental differences to reach a thin consensus on RE. However, that consensus promotes educational

contradictions in RE curriculum theory. The policy change does not promote constructive dialogue across difference among people of diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. Yet the school should be one of the spaces where such a dialogue is promoted for the socialisation, individuation, and humanisation of learners.

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of Authorisation by Malawi's Ministry of Education to Conduct Research on the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change for Secondary Schools in Malawi

Telegrams: MINED, Lilongwe
Telephone: (265) 01 789 422/ 01 789404
Telex: 44636
Fascimile: (265) 01 788 004

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
PRIVATE BAG 328
CAPITAL CITY
LILONGWE 3
MALAWI

10th January 2008

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

AUTHORITY TO CARRY OUR EDUCATION SECONDARY SCHOOL –RELATED RESEARCH

The bearer is Mr. Salanjira, a lecturer at Chancellor College in the faculty of Education. He is pursuing PhD studies in Education at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in South Africa.

To fulfill the course requirements the bearer is conducting research in Curriculum Theory and Practical on **the Dual-mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy change for Secondary Schools in Malawi.**

Any assistance offered to him in conducting the research will be greatly appreciated.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

2008 -01 10

PRIVATE BAG
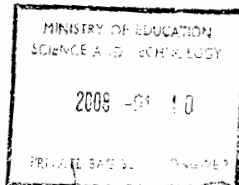
L.V. Magreta (Mrs)
For: SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance Certificate by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOBAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

02 APRIL 2008

MR. MF SALANJIRA (206526270)
CURRICULUM STUDIES

Dear Mr Salanjira
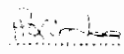
ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0707/07D

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project.

"Contesting spaces in curriculum policy change: Exploring the dual-mode Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi"

PLEASE NOTE. Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA

cc. Supervisor (Prof R Sookrajh)
cc. Prof. I Phiri
cc. Mr O Buchler (Faculty Research Office)

FOR STUDENT FILE
2008 -04- 0 3
FAC RESEARCH OFFICE

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FAC RESEARCH OFFICE

338

Appendix 3: Samples of Informed Consent Letters

Appendix 3A: Request for Informed Consent of Education Divisions in Malawi

To: The Manager, Central East Education Division, Ministry of Education, Malawi

From: Macloud Frank Salanjira, (Reg. 206526270), Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus, Yellow wood Flat 69, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Through: Dean of Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Date: 9th July 2007.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

RE: Request for your Permission and Consent to Participate in Research

I am a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Chancellor College in the University of Malawi, currently pursuing PhD studies in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. My area of specialisation and research is Curriculum Theory and Practice. My research is on *the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi* that was introduced in 2001. The expression dual-mode Religious Education (RE) is used here to denote a parallel-stream curriculum based on Bible Knowledge syllabus and Religious and Moral Education syllabus.

I would like to request for your participation in the research on Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi. The aim is to explore the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for schools in Malawi and get suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of RE in secondary schools.

Your participation will take the form of an interview with the aim of getting your views on the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change, decisions and choices that schools are making in offering RE, and your suggestions and recommendations for improvement. The interview will be for not more than one hour.

Any documents that can provide information on the topic will be valued. The information provided will be confidential and used for the purpose of the study only,

which will be a PhD Thesis with the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. For any use other than this, your permission will be sought again.

For anonymity, your name and that of your Education Division will not be mentioned. The information provided will be safely kept from any other person and will be destroyed after the study. You will also be free to withdraw from the research any time you so wish. You and your Education Division will **not** be negatively affected in any way by participating in this research. Instead you will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the RE curriculum policy change in Malawi

Your permission and informed consent for me to conduct the research are part of the ethical requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, before giving me clearance for my research. I intend to conduct my field work between November 2007 and February 2008. It is in view of this that I would like to request you to grant me the required permission. I have also written the Ministry of Education national head office for permission for this research.

I look forward to your assistance.

Yours truly,

Macloud Frank Salanjira

Declaration of permission granted and acceptance to participate in the research

I_____ (Full

names of representative/participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of

this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to the research

project.

I understand that we are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should we

so desire.

Signature of Education Division Manager
(representative)_____

Date/Stamp_____

Appendix 3B: Request for Informed Consent of the Ministry of Education in Malawi

To: Principal Secretary, Ministry of Education, Private Bag 238, Capital City, Lilongwe, Malawi

From: Macloud Frank Salanjira, (Reg. 206526270), Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus, Yellow wood Flat 69, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Through: Dean of Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Date: 9th July 2007

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Request for Permission to Conduct Research in Secondary Schools in Malawi

I am a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Chancellor College in the University of Malawi, currently pursuing PhD studies in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. My areas of specialisation and research are Curriculum Studies and Religious Education. My research is on *the policy and practice of the dual-mode curriculum of Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi* based on Bible Knowledge syllabus and Religious and Moral Education syllabus, which was introduced in the year 2001. The aim is to explore how and why the policy and practice of the RE curriculum are understood and implemented at school level and get suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of RE in secondary schools.

I would like to request for permission to conduct my research on Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi. It will involve administering a survey questionnaire to a sample of 180 head teachers of secondary schools offering RE with a distribution of 30 schools from each of the six education divisions in Malawi. The head teachers will provide information on choices schools are making in offering RE in their schools and why, and suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

In addition, I would also like to interview nine officials of the Ministry of Education, each representing one of the following jurisdictions: Directorate of Education and Methods Advisory Services, Directorate of Education Planning, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, South East Education Division, South West Education Division, Shire Highlands Education Division, Central West Education

Division, Central East Education Division, and North Education Division. These officials as policy-makers and bureaucrats will provide information on the RE policy, choices that schools are making in offering RE, perceptions about RE, suggestions and recommendations for improvement in provision of RE. The interview will be for not more than one hour. Any documents on RE will also be valuable as a source of information..

The permission and informed consent by The Ministry of Education in Malawi for me to conduct the research are part of the ethical requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, before giving me clearance for my research. I intend to conduct my field work between September 2007 and December 2007. It is in view of this that I would like to request the Ministry to grant me the required permission.

I look forward to your assistance.

Yours truly,

Macloud Frank Salanjira

Declaration of granted permission to conduct research in secondary schools in Malawi

I_____ (Full

names of officer) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and

the nature of the research project, and I consent to the research project.

I understand that we are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should we

so desire.

Signature of Ministry of Education
Representative_____

Date/Stamp_____

Appendix 3C: Sample of Request for Informed Consent of the Nationally Organised Faith-Communities in Malawi

To: Executive Director, Muslim Association of Malawi, Box-. Malawi

From: Macloud Frank Salanjira, (Reg. 206526270), Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus, Yellow wood Flat 69, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Through: Dean of Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Date: 9th July 2007

Dear Sir,

RE: Request for participation of your faith community in research on the policy and practice of Religious Education (RE) for secondary schools in Malawi

I am a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Chancellor College in the University of Malawi, currently pursuing PhD studies in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. My area of specialisation and research is Curriculum Theory and Practice in Religious Education. My research is on *the policy and practice of the dual-mode curriculum of Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi* that was introduced in 2001 based on Bible Knowledge syllabus and Religious and Moral Education syllabus.

The aim is to find out the official position of your faith community about the current policy and practice of RE and get suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of RE in secondary schools in Malawi. Your faith community has been identified to participate in the research as one of the important stakeholders in the provision of education in Malawi. Your participation will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the policy and practice of RE in Malawi.

Your faith community will participate in an interview with one representative of your faith community. The interview will be for less than one hour at time and place convenient to you. Any documents that can provide information on the topic will also be valued. The information provided will be confidential and used for the purpose of the study only, which will be a PhD Thesis with the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. For any use other than this, your permission will be sought again.

For anonymity, your faith-community and research participant will not be mentioned. The information provided will be safely kept from any other person and will be destroyed after the study. You will also be free to withdraw from the research any time you so wish. Your faith community and representative will **not** be negatively

affected in any way by participating in this research. Instead you will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the policy and practice of RE in Malawi.

The permission and informed consent of The Muslim Association of Malawi national head office to participate in the research are part of the ethical requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, before giving me clearance for my research. I intend to conduct my field work between September 2007 and December 2007. It is in view of this that I would like to request your office to grant me the required permission.

I look forward to your assistance and participation in the research.

Yours truly,

Macloud Frank Salanjira

Declaration of permission and acceptance to participate in the research

I_____ (Full

names of representative/participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of

this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to the research

project.

I understand that we are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should we

so desire.

Signature of Muslim Association of Malawi
Representative_____

Date/Stamp_____

Appendix 3D: Sample of Request for Informed Consent of Secondary School Head Teachers in Malawi

To: The Head Teacher

From: Macloud Frank Salanjira, (Reg. 206526270), Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus, Yellow wood Flat 69, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Through: Dean of Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Date: 9th July 2007

Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: Request for your participation in research

I am a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Chancellor College in the University of Malawi, currently pursuing PhD studies in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. My area of specialisation and research is Curriculum Theory and Practice. My research is on ***the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi*** that was introduced in 2001. The expression dual-mode Religious Education is used here to denote a parallel-stream curriculum based on Bible Knowledge syllabus and Religious and Moral Education syllabus.

I would like to request for your participation in the research on Religious Education (RE) for secondary schools in Malawi. The aim is to explore how and why the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change is understood and implemented at school level and get suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of RE in secondary schools.

You are one of a sample of 51 head teachers of secondary schools offering RE in Malawi your and have been identified because of your central role as leaders in making curriculum decisions and choices at school level. You will be requested to complete a questionnaire on decisions schools are making in offering RE in their schools, and suggestions and recommendations for improvement in the provision of RE in Malawi.

Four approaches will be used to administer the questionnaire. You will be involved in one of them depending on the situation. The first approach will be posting the questionnaires to the participants with a duly completed envelop for posting back the questionnaire after completion. The second approach will involve arranging for a meeting with research participants at one central place where the questionnaire will

be completed with travel expenses reimbursed and meal allowances paid at the prevailing government rate. The third approach will involve visiting research participants at the marking centers for the Malawi junior and senior certificate examinations where they will complete the questionnaire. The fourth one will involve visiting and requesting those head teachers pursuing further studies at the University of Malawi.

The information provided will be confidential and used for the purpose of the study only, which will be a PhD Thesis with the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. For any use other than this, your permission will be sought again.

Your name and that of your school will not be mentioned and the information provided will be safely kept from any other person and will be destroyed after the study. You will also be free to withdraw from the research any time you so wish. You and your school will **not** be negatively affected in any way by participating in this research. Instead you will make valuable contribution to the understanding of the RE curriculum policy change in Malawi

Your permission and acceptance to participate in the research are part of the ethical requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, before giving me clearance for my research. I intend to conduct my field work between November 2007 and February 2008. It is in view of this that I would like to request for your permission and acceptance. I have also written The Ministry of Education national head office and Education Division head office for permission for this research.

I look forward to your assistance.

Yours truly,

Macloud Frank Salanjira

Declaration of permission and acceptance to participate in the research
I_____ (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Signature of Head Teacher_____

Date/Stamp_____

Appendix 4: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule/Guide with Representatives of Ministry of Education.

In-depth interviews with one Ministry of Education (MOE) representative from the following sections: Directorate of Education and Methods Advisory Services (DEMAS), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), Directorate of Education Planning (DEP) South East Education Division (SEED), South West Education Division (SWED), Shire Highlands Education Division (SHED), Central East Education Division (CEED), Central West Education Division (CWED) Northern Education Division (NED) (Interviews to tape-recorded and transcribed).

Topic of PhD Thesis
Contesting spaces in curriculum policy change: Exploring the dual-mode Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi

Central research question
What is the essence of the understandings regarding the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change for Malawi secondary schools?

1**. Personal Data**

a. Name (with permission)_____
b.Sex_____
c.Age_____
d. Religious affiliation (faith-community membership)_____
e. Position in a faith-community_____
f. Ministry of Education section re presented_____

**Theme 1: Background to Religious Education curriculum change in 2001.
      (Historical & socio-political context of the dual –mode RE)**

2.   Why did the Ministry of Education introduce the dual-mode RE curriculum of
       BK and RME in secondary schools in 2001?
       -Nchifukwa chiyani Unduna wa za Maphunziro unakhazikitsa maphunziro a
       BK ndi RME msukulu za sekondale mckaka cha 2001?

3.   What are the principles on which the dual-mode RE curriculum is based?
       -Mndondomeko yophunzitsa BK ndi RME yagona pa mfundo zanji?

4.   How did the Ministry of Education prepare the society in Malawi for the introduction of RME and BK?
      -Ngati Unduna wa za Maphunziro munachita chiyani kuti aMalawi alandire maphunziro a BK ndi RME?

5.   According to the Ministry of Education, how was this change received by the society?
      - Malingana ndi Unduna wa za Maphunziro ndondomeko yophuzitsa BK ndi RME msukulu za sekondale inalandiridwa bwanji ndi anthu M'Malawi? Chifukwa chiyani?
      (**Probes:** a. makolo ,b. ana asukulu, c. amphunzitsi, d. mipingo/ mabungwe azipembedzo -reasons why some people have opposed the introduction of the dual-mode RE curriculum of BK and RME?)

Theme 2:   RE Curriculum change and choices at school level

6.   According to the Ministry of Education, are the schools implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum policy as planned and communicated to theme?
      -Monga Unduna wa za Maphunziro, mukuganiza kuti sukulu zikuphunzitsa phunziro la za uzimu monga munakonzera?

7.   According to the Ministry of Education, what choices are being made at school level regarding the praxis of the dual-mode curriculum of Religious Education?
      -Monga Unduna wa za Maphunziro, mukuganiza kuti sukulu zikusankha bwanji pophunzitsa BK ndi RME? (**Probes:** Does the Ministry think schools clearly understand how they should implement the dual-mode RE curriculum? Has there been any orientation on this?)

8.   What does the Ministry of Education think are the reasons for the choices that schools are making regarding the praxis of the dual mode RE curriculum?
      -Kodi Unduna wa za Maphunziro ukuganiza kuti ndi zifukwa zanji zomwe zikupangitsa kuti sukulu zizisankha kaphunzitsidwe ka phunziro la za uzimu?

9.   What support is the Ministry of Education offering to schools for the implementation of the dual-mode RE curriculum?
      -Kodi Unduna wa za Maphunziro ukupereka thandizo lanji lothandiza kuphunzitsa BK ndi RME msukulu?

10.   What problems, if any, is the Ministry of Education facing in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum in secondary schools?
      -Ndimavuto otani omwe Unduna wa za Maphunziro ukupezana nawo kuti ndondomeko yophunzitsa BK ndi RME ichitike msukulu za sekondale?

Theme 3: Perceptions, assumptions and contestations about the dual-mode RE curriculum

11. According to the Ministry of Education, how is the dual-mode RE curriculum perceived by people in Malawi
    -Mukuganiza kuti mndondomeko imeneyi anthu akuiwona bwanji?

12. What is the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the faith community leaders regarding the implementation of the dual-mode RE curriculum?
    -Kodi pali mgwirizano wanji pakati pa Unduna wa za Maphunziro ndi atsogoleri a mipongo pokhazikitsa mndondomeko yophunzitsa BK ndi RME msukulu?

13. Some people think the dual-mode RE curriculum is there for political rather educational purposes. What is the opinion of the Ministry of Education on this?
    -Anthu ena akuganiza kuti mndondomeko imeneyi inakhazikitsidwa pazifukwa zandale osati maphunziro ayi. Kodi Unduna wa za Maphunziro ukuti chiyani pamenepa?

14. What does the Ministry of Education think should be the way forward for RE in Malawi?

    - Unduna wa za Maphunziro maganizo ake ndiotani pa za tsogolo la phunziro la za uzimu msukulu zathu za sekondale?

Appendix 5: Questionnaire for Secondary School Head Teachers

Research topic:

Contesting spaces in curriculum policy change: Exploring the dual-mode Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi

Central research question:
What is the essence of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for Malawi secondary schools (using the perspectives of head teachers of secondary schools offering RE)?

Dear research participant,

Firstly let me thank you for your acceptance and willingness to participate in this study. I am a student of Curriculum Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and would like to conduct research on the above-mentioned topic. It is a follow-up study on the introduction of Bible Knowledge (BK) and Religious and Moral Education (RME) syllabuses in Malawi secondary in 2001. The expression 'dual-mode Religious Education curriculum' is used here to refer to a curriculum of Religious Education based on the two syllabuses of BK and RME. The study would like to get your views about this dual-mode RE curriculum regarding decisions that schools are making with respect to teaching BK and RME.

The information to be provided will be treated with confidentiality; your name and school will not be mentioned. The information provided will only be used for the purposes of this study. So feel free to participate in this study and to express your perceptions the inclusion of BK and RME in the school curriculum.

Please note that there are no correct or wrong responses in this study. The aim is to get information that accurately represents your views regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum. You are also free, where you feel uncomfortable with a question, to leave it unanswered or withdraw from the study at any point you so wish and that will have **no** negative effect on you or your school. Instead, your participation in the study will highly be appreciated and make a contribution to the understanding of the policy and practice of RE curriculum in Malawi secondary schools.

Your personal information and that of your school will be confidential but will help to make follow-ups and further contacts with you, dear research participant, if need be. I, therefore, would like to assure you of the confidentiality and security that you deserve as you participate in this study.

The questionnaire has two sections; A and B, with questions in English and their local language (Chichewa) translations. For **section A** there are fifteen questions with pre-coded responses. All you need to do is to circle the number that represents your

perception or view best. **Section B** has one open-ended question requiring you to write your response in the space provided to describe your views and perceptions.

I wish you all the best as you participate in this research.

Macloud Frank Salanjira (PhD Student, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa).

Section A: Questions with pre-coded responses

1**.**   **Personal data**
1a. Name of education division in which the school is found_____
1b. Name of school_____
1c. Type of school: i. Government _____ ii.Grant- aided_____ iii.CDSS_____
      iv.Pivate___(Tick)
1d. Name of head teacher (with permission)_____
1e. Experience_____

1f. Sex_____
1g. Age_____
1h. Religious affiliation (faith community membership) _____
1k. Position in a faith community_____

 Please tick against the option that you feel represents your view or perception.

2. It is felt that pupils should **not** learn Religious Education (RE) in schools in
   Malawi. What is your opinion on this?
 -Anthu ena amati phnziro la 'Religious Education' lisamaphunzitsidwe msukulu
 M'Malawi muno. Inu maganizo anu ndi otani pamenepa?

2a. Yes_____   2b. No_____   2c. No opinion_____

3. In your view, which **one** of the following should be the aim of teaching RE in schools?
   -Inu mukuganiza kuti cholinga cha phunziro la RE chikhale chiyani?

3a.   to help pupils grow in faith
3b.   to help pupils develop good morals
3c.   to help pupils understand their religion only
3d.   to help pupils understand their and other peoples' religion

In the year 2001, the Ministry of Education introduced a dual-mode RE curriculum policy of teaching Religious Education in secondary schools in Malawi based on Bible Knowledge (BK) and Religious and Moral Education (RME).
   -Mchaka cha 2001, Unduna wa za Maphunziro unakhazikitsa ndondomeko yatsopano

ya phunziro la za uzimu kuti ana asukulu za sekondale azimphunzira BK ndi RME.

4. What is your understanding of how the dual-mode RE curriculum
   policy should be implemented at school level?
   -Inu mndondomeko imeneyi mukuimva bwanji poikhazikitsa msululu?

4a. Schools should offer both BK and RME as optional subjects for pupils to
     choose one if they want to study RE.
4b. Schools should offer both BK and RME as optional subjects and pupils
     can choose both if they want to study them.
4c. Schools should offer either BK or RME as an optional subject that
      pupils can choose to study.
4d. Schools should offer either BK or RME as a compulsory subject that all
      pupils should study.

5. Which **one** of the following decisions are you making in implementing
     the RE curriculum in this school?
   - Inu mndondomeko imeneyi mukuikhazikitsa bwanji pa sukulu pano?

5a.   Offering both Bible Knowledge and Religious and Moral Education
5b.   Offering Bible Knowledge only
5c.   Offering Religious and Moral Education only
5d   Offering none of the above

6. Which **one** of the following reasons **best** explains why your school is
     making the above-mentioned decision in offering RE?
   -Ndifukwa chiti chomwe chikufotokoza kwambiri zomwe mukutsata pa mndondomeko
     imeneyi?
6a.   The school has sufficient RE teachers to offer both BK and RME
6b.   The school has teachers who are confident and willing to teach BK
6c.   The school has teachers who are confident and willing to teach RME
6d.   The school does not have teachers to teach Religious Education

7. Do parents in the community interfere with the teaching of the dual-mode RE
curriculum?
- Nanga makolo amalowererapo pa mndondomeko ya BK ndi RME pasukulu pano?
7a. Yes_____   7b. No._____

8. In your view, which **one** of the following is the teaching of both BK and RME in
schools **most likely** to promote?
- Inu mukuganiza kuti mphunziro la za uzimu lingathandize kwambiri chiyani pazithu
  izi?
8a.   Tolerance among people of different faiths
8b.   Disunity among people of different faiths
8c.   Leading learners to a confession of faith

8d.   Leading learners to a clear understanding of religion

9. It is felt that the inclusion of BK and RME in the same school curriculum has created ambiguous aims for Religious Education. What is your opinion on this statement?
- Anthu ena akuona kuti kuphunzitsa BK ndi RME pamodzi msukulu kwakhazikitsa zolinga zotsutsana ndi zosamveka bwino za phunziro la RE. Inu maganizo anu ndi otani pamenepa?
9a.   I strongly agree
9b.   I agree
9c.   No opinion
9d.   I strongly disagree
9e.   I disagree

10. In your view, which **one** of the following problems facing the
    Implementation of the dual-mode curriculum of RME and BK do you
    perceive to be affecting your school **most**?
   -Inu mukuona kuti ndi vuto liti lomwe mukukumana nalo kwambiri pophunzitsa BK
    ndi RME pa sukulu pano?
10a.   Lack of Religious Education teachers
10b.   Lack of teaching materials for both RME and BK
10c.   Lack of in-service training of RE teachers for BK and RME
10d.   RE teachers are not willing to teach both BK and RME
10e.   Perceiving multi-faith RE as a way of islamising the country.

11. In your view, which **one** of the following factors is the **most** important
    cause/ reason for the above mentioned problem faced in implementing the dual-mode
    RE curriculum in your school?
   -Inu mukuona kuti vuto mwalitchula pamwambali likubwera kwambiri pa chifukwa
    chiti mwa izi?

11a.   Politicisation of the multifaith Religious Education curriculum
11b.   Conflict between educational and religious aims of RE in public
        schools
11c.   Lack of public sensitisation about the role of RE in public schools
11d.   Lack of implementation support from the Ministry of Education

12. In your view, which of the following **best** represents how the faith communities are
    influencing the practice of the dual-mode RE curriculum in the school?
    -Inu mukuganiza kuti amipingo akukhuzana bwanji ndi kakhazikitsidwe ka BK ndi
    RME msukulu?

12a.   Christian faith communities are supporting the teaching of BK while
        Muslim faith communities are supporting RME in the school
12b.   Both Christian and Muslim faith communities do not want RE to be
        taught in the school
12c.   Both Christian and Muslim faith communities view RE as a means of

promoting their religion among learners in the school
12d.　　Christian and Muslim faith communities are supporting both BK and
　　　　RME in the school

13.　　Which **one** of the following best represents your perceptions regarding
　　　　the policy and praxis of the dual-mode RE curriculum of BK and
　　　　RME?
　-　　Ndichiyani mwa izi chomwe mukuona kuti chikukhuzana kwambiri ndi
　　　　mndondomeko ya BK ndi RME?
13a.　　It is an over-burden to schools to teach both BK and RME
13b.　　There is a feeling that BK is for Christians and RME is for Muslims
13c.　　There is thinking that Malawi is predominantly Christian, so only BK
　　　　should be taught
13d.　　There is conflict between religious and educational reasons for RE in
　　　　schools

14.　It is felt that the dual-mode RE curriculum is based on Malawi's political
　　　need to maintain peace and unity among people with different demands
　　　for Religious Education. What is your opinion on this statement?
　-Anthu ena akuona kuti mnodnodmeko ya BK ndi RME inakhazikitsidwa msukulu
　pazolinga za ndale zofuna kukhazikitsa bata ndi mtendere pakati pa anthu M'Malawi
　muno. Inu maganizo anu ndi otani pamenepa? RE

　　　　14a. I strongly agree
　　　　14b. I agree
　　　　14c. No opinion
　　　　14d. I strongly disagree
　　　　14e. I disagree

15. Has your school received any implementation support for the dual-mode
　　　RE curriculum? (Tick under yes or no)
　-Kodi sukulu yanu yalandirapo thandizo lina liri lonse pokhazikitsa mndondomeko ya
　BK ndi RME?

	Kind of support	Sources	Yes	No
15a.	Books for BK and RME	Ministry of Education		
15b	RE school visits	Curriculum planners and methods advisors		
15c.	In-service training	Ministry of Education		
15d. Specify other				

Section B: Open-Ended Survey Question

Please write your response to the following question in the space provided. Where space is inadequate, feel free to use additional sheet of paper to express yourself fully. There is no correct or wrong answer. What is need is a description of your views and perceptions.

16. Describe your views about the change from the teaching of BK **only** to the
    teaching of BK and RME in schools. (Your perceptions, likes, and dislikes)
     - Fotokozani maganizo anu pa zakusintha kuchokera ku phunziro la BK kupita ku
       mndondomeko ya BK ndi RME. (Zinthu zomwe mukugwirizana nazo kapena ayi)

Appendix 6: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule with Faith-Community Leaders.

In-depth interview with representative leaders of five nationally organised faith communities/religious organizations in Malawi – Malawi Council of Churches(MCC), Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM), Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM), and Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDC) (Interviews to be tape-recorded and transcribed)

Topic of PhD Thesis

Spaces of contestation in curriculum policy change: Exploring the dual-mode Religious Education for secondary schools in Malawi

Central research question:

What are the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi (using the perspectives of leaders of nationally organised faith communities)?

1**.   Personal data**
 a. Name of faith community/religious organisation represented by the respondent

   _____

b. Name of respondent (with permission) _____
c. Sex_____
d. Religious affiliation (faith community membership)_____
e. Position in a faith community_____
f. Date of interview_____

Theme 1*:* Theme 1: Background to the dual-mode RE curriculum change in 2001.
     (Historical & socio-political context of the dual-mode RE)

Ever since schools started in Malawi by the missionaries in the 1870s, Religious Education has been one of the subjects in the school curriculum.
-Kuyambira nthawi imene sukulu zinayamba M'Malawi muno ndi amipingo (kuyambira zaka za ma 1870), Mphunziro la zauzimm ndi limodzi mwamaphunziro amene akuperekedwa msukulu.

356

2.a. What is the view of your faith community about the teaching of Religious Education
       in schools in Malawi?
   b. Why?
-Kodi   bungwe lanu maganizo ake ndiotani pa za phunziro la za uzimu m'msukulu
M'Malawi muno? Chifukwa chiyani?

3.a.   What is the understanding of your faith community about the role of Religious
           Education in public schools?
   b. Why?
-Kodi bungwe lanu (mpingo wanu) umaona kuti ntchito ya mphunziro lazauzimu ikhale
yotani msukulu? Chifukwa chaiyani? (**Probes:**   aims, rationale principles of Religious
Education public schools? Why?)

Theme 2: RE curriculum change and choices at school level

 In the year 2001, the Ministry of Education introduced curriculum change in Religious
Education from a single faith RE curriculum to a dual-mode RE curriculum of BK and
RME in secondary schools.
- Mchaka cha 2001, Unduna wa za Maphunziro unakhazikitsa ndondomeko yatsopano ya
phunziro la za uzimu kuti ana asukulu za sekondale azimphunzira BK ndi RME.

4.   Is your faith community familiar with the change in RE curriculum for
          secondary schools that was introduced in 2001?
- Kodi bungwe lanu likudziwa kusitha kwa phunziro la zauzimu komwe kunachita
mckaka cha 2001.

5. a.   Some people are in favour of BK as opposed to RME. What is the position of
          your faith-community?
- Anthu ena akufuna BK m'malo mwa RME. Inu bungwe lanu maganizo ake ndiotani?
   b.   Why?
           Chifukwa chiyani?

6.   Is there any relationship between your faith community and the Ministry of
          Education with regard to the implementation of the new RE curriculum in schools?
     Kodi pali mgwirizano otani pakati pa bungwe lanu ndi Unduna wa za Maphunziro
     pokhazikitsa mndondomeko imeneyi msukulu.

Theme 3: Perceptions, assumptions, and contestation about the dual-mode RE curriculum

7.   What are the views of your faith community about the dual-mode RE curriculum change?

- Inu maganizo abungwe kapena mpingo wanu ndi otani pakusintha kumeneku.

(**Probes:** perceptions, likes, dislikes, and why? Does your faith community think the teaching of BK and RME as RE in same school curriculum is adequately meeting the aims of education or is meeting the political aim of maintaining peace and unity among people?)

8.   What does your faith community think are the reasons why the Ministry of
          Education introduced this curriculum change in the secondary schools?

-Inu bungwe lanu kapena mpingo wanu mukaganiza kuti ndi chifukwa chiyani Unduna wa za Maphunziro unakhazikitsa ndondomeko imeneyi?

9. a.   Is there anything that your faith community would like the Ministry of Education
          to do about the present RE curriculum?

  b. Why?

-Inu mudakakonda kuti Unduna wa za Maphunziro uchitepo chiyani pa ndondomeko imeneyi? Chifukwa chiyani?

10.   Some people think the dual-mode RE curriculum is there for political rather
        educational purposes. What is the opinion of your faith-community on this?

-Anthu ena akuganiza kuti mndondomeko imeneyi inakhazikitsidwa pazifukwa zandale
        osati maphunziro ayi. Kodi bungwe lanu likuti chiyani pamenepa?

11.   What does your faith community think should be the way forward for RE in
          Malawi secondary schools? (**Probes**: in the midst of globalization,
          democratization, and new age theology)

-Inu bungwe lanu kapena mpingo wanu maganizo ake ndiotani pa za tsogolo la phunziro la za uzimu msukulu zathu za sekondale malingana ndi nyengo ya 'globalisation', demokalase, ndi 'new age theology'?

Appendix 7A: Description of Thematic Data Analysis Procedure

I provide a description and justification of the method and procedure of data analysis that I followed in analysing the qualitative data of the study.

Familiarising Myself with the Qualitative Data

I started analysing the in-depth interview data by transcribing and typing the tape-recoded 15 interviews that I had conducted with the nine Ministry of Education offices and six nationally organised faith-community offices. I also typed the qualitative questionnaire data I had generated with the head teachers. Transcribing and typing were part of the process of familiarising myself with the data. Here Riesman (1993) observes that although the process of transcription may seem time-consuming, frustrating, and boring at times, it is one excellent way of starting familiarising yourself with data. Commenting on the importance of transcribing as an aspect of the thematic analytic phase, Bird (2005, p. 227) argues that transcription should be regarded as "a key phase of data analysis within the interpretative qualitative methodology". It is also further argued that the process of transcribing tape-recorded interviews should be recognized as an interpretative act where meanings are created, and not simply as a mechanical act of putting spoken sounds on paper (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

After transcribing and typing the data, I edited the transcripts by checking them back against the recorded tapes. The aim here was to ensure that the transcripts had retained the information from the verbal accounts of the interviews in a way which was true to their original nature. Transcribing and typing of the qualitative questionnaire data were important tasks in familiarising myself with the data and helped me to develop a far more thorough understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the transcribing and typing, another aspect of familiarising myself with the data was what Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe as immersion in the data, which involved reading and re-reading through the data. Thus, I read and re-read through the data corpus, consisting of the transcriptions, typed copy of the head teachers' questionnaire open-ended response, and documents. This enabled me to become intimately familiar with the qualitative data.

Generating Codes

After familiarising myself with the qualitative data, the next phase was data coding. Coding data is the process of transforming raw data for the purposes of analysis. Based on my immersion in and heightened awareness of the data - resulting from my familiarization with the data – I started open-coding manually. This is otherwise described as manifest content analysis (Sarantakos, 2005), where the data are opened for ideas, themes, categories, or patterns emerging from the manifest content. Open-coding is conducted "to identify first-order concepts and substantive codes" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 349). I coded the data by using highlighters and writing notes in and on the margin of the text, to mark ideas. Coding involved reading and re-reading, coding and re-coding the data. This was done to identify segments (codes) of the data that reflected some ideas about the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi.

The importance of generating codes as an aspect of thematic analysis is acknowledged by Braun and Clarke (2006) who observe that codes identify a feature of the data, be it semantic (manifest) or latent content that appears interesting to the analyst. Boyatzis (1998, p. 63) describes codes as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon." Miles and Huberman (1994) acknowledge coding as an important part of data analysis, whilst Tuckett (2005) argues that coding helps the analyst to organise the data into meaningful groups. Thus, coding is a critical aspect of thematic analysis since it finally leads to the development of themes in the next phase of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Commenting on codes, Siedel (1998) differentiates between codes as heuristic tools and codes as objectivist, transparent representations of facts. Heuristic codes are used as tools to facilitate discovery and further investigation of the data. As Siedel (1998, p. 14) observes, in "a heuristic approach, code words are primarily flags or signposts that point to things in the data." On the other hand, objectivist codes are condensed representations of the facts described in the data and "can be treated as surrogates for the text, and the analysis can focus on the codes instead of the text itself" (Siedel, 1998, p. 14). In this

study, the coding and codes have been used as heuristic tools about the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. To that extent, the codes have helped me to organise and develop themes from the data.

Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate two types of coding: data-driven coding and theory-driven coding. The former leads to the development of themes that "depend on the data"(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89), and this can also be described as inductive or grounded coding. Theory-driven coding is done "with specific questions in mind that you wish to code around" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89), and can be described as deductive or theoretical, or *a priori* coding. The coding employed in this study is data-driven, inductive or grounded coding in the sense that the codes were generated from and not imposed on the data.

It can be argued that coding was one phase of the research process where my role as a researcher and analyst was critical as co-producer and manipulator of knowledge. This is because what got coded as interesting features of the data depended on my personal curiosity and creativity. The data set was coded inductively by generating codes that had relevance to the key research question within my limited and bounded perspective. Thus, the same data could have been coded differently by different analysts.

Three guidelines according to Braun and Clarke (2006) were borne in mind when coding data. Firstly, I tried to code the data for as many potential interesting features as possible. Secondly, I coded the data inclusively by keeping a little of the relevant surrounding data as a way of remaining true to the context of the data and avoiding the common criticism of losing the context in the process of coding (Bryman, 2001). Thirdly, I coded individual extracts of data in as many ways as possible and as relevant, so that some parts of text were uncoded, others were coded once or many times. At the end of this phase, all data extracts were coded and collated together within each code.

Generating Initial Themes

Generating themes can be likened to the second level of coding by Sarantakos (2005, p. 350) described as "axial coding". At this level of coding I interconnected the codes generated under open-coding to construct higher-order concepts called themes (patterns or categories). Sarantakos (2005) also describes this phase of generating initial themes as theoretical coding or latent content analysis. It is a more advanced level of coding than open-coding, since it involves interconnecting "first-order concepts to construct higher-order concepts" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 350). Whilst open-coding just opens data to theoretical possibilities, axial-coding finds relationships between the first order concepts (codes) to reach a higher level of abstraction. This task is called generating initial themes since it involves identifying relationships between and among the generated codes to come up with themes on the social phenomenon under study.

The generation of initial themes was based on the generated codes, which led to the development of a thematic map on the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. This was done by sorting the codes into potential patterns or themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. In keeping with my key research question and title of the study, I engaged the codes to generate the themes reflecting contesting spaces in the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Whilst constructing the themes, I searched for those themes that had internal convergence and external convergence (Guba, 1978). Internal and external convergences imply that the themes have to be internally consistent but distinct from one another. It should be noted, however, that I did not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive themes, but identified salient themes of the understandings by each category of the research participants.

Patton (2002, pp. 457-458) differentiates between themes as "indigenous typologies" and themes as "analyst-constructed typologies". Indigenous typologies are those themes created, expressed and used by the research participants whilst the analyst-constructed

typologies are those themes created by the researcher and grounded in the data but not necessarily used by the research participants themselves (Patton, 2002). Using the notion of themes as analyst-constructed typologies, I constructed an initial thematic map on the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

However, as Patton (2002) warns, the use of analyst-constructed typologies has the limitation of running the risk of imposing a world of meaning on the participants that better reflects the analyst's world than that of the research participants. To mitigate this limitation, I used, for each theme, data extracts with adequate detail, to remain true to context of the study and perspectives of the research participants. As Terre-Blanche et al (2006, p.321) point out, the "key to doing a good interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data, to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding." I ended this phase with a list of themes for each category of the research participants, as summarised in Appendix 7B, Table 7B.1 below.

After generating an initial thematic list, I tested the themes within the data to see whether they had the explanatory power they were supposed to have about the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. I first applied each theme to a small area of the qualitative data, then to a larger one, and finally right through the whole data set, within each of the three research participants' categories.

Reviewing Themes

Reviewing themes involves the refinement of the initial thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this task, some of the themes generated for the initial thematic map could no longer stand as main themes and had to collapse into sub-themes. In the end, I came up with two main thematic categories, namely, positive and negative understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The guiding principles followed here were Patton's (2002) twin constructs of 'internal homogeneity' and 'external heterogeneity' of themes. These constructs respectively denote that data "within the themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be identifiable distinctions between themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). Each thematic

category had themes representing the understandings according to each category of the research participants as summarised in Appendix 7B, Table 7B.2 below.

I reviewed the themes at two levels. The first level involved all coded data extracts. This was done by reading and checking all collated extracts for each theme, for a coherent pattern. Once that was done for all the themes, I moved on to the second level, which involved my entire data set for each category of research participants. At this level, I considered the validity of individual themes in relation to my data set, and also checked whether the generated thematic map accurately reflected "the meanings evident in the data set as a whole" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This was done by re-reading my entire data set with two purposes in mind. The first was to check for coherence between the themes and data set. The second was to code, where possible, any additional data within the themes that I might have missed in the earlier coding phase. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91) assert that, the re-coding of the "data set is expected as coding is an organic process."

Defining and Naming Themes

This was a phase of refining the themes. After generating and reviewing a satisfactory list of themes from the data, I defined and named them in a way they were to be presented as research findings. I also analysed the data within the themes to ensure the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of themes. This entailed "identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is all about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures"(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). However, I tried to avoid getting a theme to do too much or to be too diverse or complex. This was done by going back to my collated data extracts for the themes, identifying what was of interest about them according to my research question, and organising them into a coherent and internally consistent account, with accompanying narrative as presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

Refining themes relates to what Sarantakos (2005) describes as, selective coding, which denotes the selecting of higher-order categories or themes with theoretical saturation and high explanatory power. In the main, this phase consisted of thinking about the

relationship between the codes, themes, and different levels of themes such as thematic categories and the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the end, I had a final thematic map as shown in Appendix 7B, Table 7B.3 below.

Appendix 7B: Thematic Map Tables

Table 7B.1: Initial Thematic Map

Themes by Secondary School Head Teachers	Themes by Ministry of Education Officials	Themes by Faith-Community Leaders
1. Hasty curriculum introduction 2. Source of additional problems for the school curriculum 3. Doing learners more harm than good 4. Broadening learners' cognitive horizons 5. Civil toleration of differences 6. Politicisation of the dual-mode RE curriculum 7. Civil toleration of differences 8. Curriculum implementation problems	1. Democracy and religious diversity 2. Academic justification of the dual-mode RE curriculum 3. Political justification of the dual-mode RE curriculum 4. Preparation for the dual-mode RE curriculum implementation 5. Optionality of the dual-mode RE curriculum 6. Curriculum implementation challenges 7. Mixed reactions for the dual-mode RE curriculum policy	1. Democracy and religious diversity 2. Broadening the learners' worldview 3. The dual-mode RE curriculum as a compromise 4. Rationale of the dual-mode RE curriculum 5. Lack of curriculum consultation 6. Politicisation of the dual-mode RE curriculum 7. Affecting learners' moral development 8. Lack of curriculum implementation support 9. Tension between secular and sacred understanding of RE 10. Historicity of education and RE in Malawi

Table 7B.2: Reviewed Thematic Map

Thematic Category	Secondary School Head Teachers	Ministry of Education Officials	Faith-Community Leaders
Positive Understandings	1. Civil toleration of differences 2. Learners' cultural and religious literacy and moral development 3. Broadening learners' cognitive horizons	1. Democracy and religious diversity 2. Academic justification of the dual-mode RE curriculum 3. Political justification of the dual-mode RE curriculum	1. Democracy and religious diversity 2. Broadening the learners' worldview 3. The dual-mode RE curriculum as a compromise 4. Rationale of the dual-mode RE curriculum
Negative Understandings	1. Hasty curriculum introduction 2. Source of additional problems for the school curriculum 3. Doing learners more harm than good 4. Politicisation of the dual-mode RE curriculum 5. Curriculum implementation problems	1. Inadequate preparation for the dual-mode RE curriculum implementation 2. Optionality of the dual-mode RE curriculum 3. Curriculum implementation challenges 4. Mixed reactions for the dual-mode RE curriculum policy	1. Lack of curriculum consultation 2. Politicisation of the dual-mode RE curriculum 3. Affecting learners' moral development 4. Lack of curriculum implementation support 5. Tension between secular and sacred understanding of RE 6. Historicity of education and RE in Malawi

Table 7B.3: Final Thematic Map

Thematic Category	Secondary School Head Teachers	Ministry of Education Officials	Faith-Community Leaders
Positive Understandings	1. Curriculum policy change against segregation and intolerance 2. Curriculum policy change broadening learners' worldview	1. Curriculum policy change good for democracy, religious diversity and civil toleration of differences 2. Curriculum policy change: A politically correct compromise 3. Curriculum policy change meeting Malawi's academic needs 4. Meeting political ideologies and pressures of the time	1. Upholding people's rights and freedom of worship 2. For academic, moral and spiritual growth 3. A compromise between Christian and Muslim faith-communities' demands 4. Curriculum policy change in accordance with Malawi's constitution 5. Curriculum policy for moral education and tolerance
Negative Understandings	1. Hasty curriculum introduction 2. Curriculum policy change increasing problems for schools 3. Curriculum policy change introduced under political pressure 4. Lack of curriculum implementation support	1. Lack of adequate preparation prior to curriculum implementation 2. Difficulty of getting policy change beyond bureaucracy into practice 3. Timing negating policy implementation 4. Curriculum optionality negating policy implementation	1. Lack of consultation prior to curriculum policy change 2. Curriculum policy change negating learners' moral development 3. Curriculum policy change reflecting hegemony 4. Lack of teachers and teaching materials for Religious and Moral Education 5. Tension between secular and sacred conception of Religious Education

One insight from the final thematic map is that there were more negative than positive themes across the three categories of the research participants. This may indicate that the policy change was understood more as a liability than an asset for Malawi. This final thematic map has formed the basis of the presentation and discussion of the research findings in section three of this thesis dealing with Chapters Six and Seven.

Appendix 7C: Description of Statistical Data Analysis Process

This section describes how the quantitative data was analysed. The data was generated through a questionnaire administered to 54 head teachers of secondary schools offering RE in Malawi and was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) programme. The intention here was to come up with descriptive statistics of head teachers' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi. A descriptive statistic is used to describe a set of cases upon which observations about the phenomenon under study are made (Durrheim, 2006; Sarantakos, 2005). In the case of this study, the phenomenon is the head teachers' understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change. The observations were made in keeping with the following research questions:

- What decisions were schools making in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change?

- Why were schools making such decisions?

- How was the dual-mode RE curriculum policy understood by the head teachers of secondary schools offering RE?

These descriptive statistics helped me to shade light on the head teachers' understandings of the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change.

Since a purposive convenience sample of head teachers was used, the intention was not to make generalisations but to complement the qualitative findings. In Chapter Six and Seven some of the descriptive statistics have been integrated with the findings from thematic data analysis to tell the overall story on the key research question: What was the

essence of the understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum policy change for secondary schools in Malawi, (using the perspectives of Ministry of Education officials, secondary school head teachers and leaders of nationally organised faith-communities?

Statistical data analysis involves quantifying and summarising numerical data (Durrheim, 2006; Sarantakos, 2005). In my case, this analytic process involved two stages: preparing data and describing variables. What follows is discussion of how and why each of these two stages was conducted.

Data Preparation for Computer Entry

After receiving back questionnaires from the 54 secondary school head teachers, the first stage of statistical data analysis involved transforming the raw data (the head teachers' responses to the 15 pre-coded questions, see Appendix 5) into an electronic format that would process the data, using a computer programme called SPPS. The preparatory stage involved four tasks: checking data, coding data, entering data, and cleaning data (Durrheim, 2006; Sarantakos, 2005).

Checking Data

Under this task, the questionnaire data was checked to ensure that it was "clear, legible, relevant and appropriate (Sarantakos, p. 364). This was important because it enabled me to decide whether to accept or reject the data. I checked all the 54 questionnaires received and discovered that one head teacher had only completed section B, which was based on an open-ended question but not section A, which was based on pre-coded responses. Thus, for section A, the actual number of completed questionnaires was 53. For section B, 41 head teachers responded to the open-ended question but 13 did not (this qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis as described above).

Coding Data

The task of coding quantitative data is different from that of coding qualitative data. In general, as Durrheim (2006, p. 187) observes, coding data "involves applying a set of rules to the data to transform information from one form to another". However, the rules

are different for coding of qualitative and quantitative data respectively. Commenting on coding data for statistical analysis, Sarantakos (2005, p 364) says coding "is the process of converting verbal responses to numerical codes. In my case, it involved transforming the verbal information provided by the head teachers on the questionnaire into numerical codes. For example, the four types of secondary schools in Malawi – government, grant-aided, community-day secondary school (CDSS), and private – were transformed from a verbal into a numerical format by coding government school as 1, grant-aided school as 2, CDSS as 3, and private school as 4. For YES and NO responses, I used 1 and 2 respectively. For the missing values (where there was no response), I used 9999 (See Appendix 5 for the questionnaire).

Data Entry into the Computer

Under this task, I entered the checked and coded responses – the numerical codes – on the questionnaire into the computer. This process of entering data into the computer involved two basic steps: defining the variables and entering the data (Sarantakos, 2005). I labelled the questionnaires consecutively from 1 to 54 and entered the numerical data from each questionnaire in that order. Durrheim (2006, p. 191) argues that labelling is important because it "allows the researcher to go back to the original questionnaire for any subject, if necessary, at a later stage."

 Cleaning Data

The final task was cleaning the data. Here Durrheim (2006, P. 192) observes that "Coding and entering data are labour intensive and boring tasks and errors can easily occur." Thus, data cleaning was done to eliminate errors that might have occurred. The task involved checking the entered data set against the questionnaires for errors and correcting any identified errors.

Describing Variables

For this task, the statistical analysis was based on generating descriptive statistics using cross-tabulations. As Durrheim (2006, p.194) states, this:

type of descriptive statistics aims to represent observations obtained on single variables in a summarised fashion. The best way of representing a set of scores to get a 'picture' of what they look like is to generate a frequency distribution. A frequency distribution is a graphical or tabular representation in which the values of a variable are plotted against the number of times (frequency) they occurred.

Thus, using the SPSS program, I generated cross-tabulations indicating associations between the head teacher's type of school and aspects of understanding regarding the dual-mode RE. Head teachers from the four categories (types) of schools were used: government, grant-aided, community-day, and private secondary schools. Some of the actual descriptive statistics for the cross-tabulations have been integrated with the themes generated by qualitative analysis as in Chapters Six and Seven).

Since statistical analysis involves quantifying and summarising numerical data (Durrheim, 2006), a summary of the descriptive statistics showing correlation between type of head teacher's school and understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum are presented in Appendix 8 below.

Appendix 8: Summary of the Quantitative Findings from Head Teachers

Since statistical analysis involves quantifying and summarising numerical data (Durrheim, 2006), a summary of the descriptive statistics showing correlation between type of head teacher's school and understandings regarding the dual-mode RE curriculum are presented in Appendix 8 below.

The summary is based on the 15 pre-coded questions administered to head teachers. Although 54 (72%) questionnaires were received back from the 71 head teachers, in many cases it was not all the 54 head teachers who responded to each of the questions. In some cases it was 53 (75%), or 52 (73%) and in others 51 (72%) head teachers who responded.

The table below shows the spread of the head teachers according to the four categories of schools in Malawi: government, grant-aided, community-day (CDSS), and private secondary schools.

Table A8.1: Spread of head teachers according to type of school

Type of school		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government	20	37.0	37.7	37.7
	Grant-Aided	9	16.7	17.0	54.7
	CDSS	19	35.2	35.8	90.6
	Private	5	9.3	9.4	100.0
	Total	53	98.1	100.0	
Missing	9999	1	1.9		
Total		54	100.0		

Tables of Cross-Tabulations Based on 15 *A Priori Themes*

Table A8.2: Opinion on whether or not Religious Education should be taught in schools

		Opinion on the inclusion of RE in schools		Total
		Yes	No	Yes
Type of School	Government	6	14	20
	Grant-Aided	3	6	9
	CDSS	8	11	19
	Private	1	3	4
Total		18	34	52

Table A8.3 View on the Aim of teaching Religious Education in the school

		View on the aim of teaching RE in schools			Total
		Helping pupils grow in faith	Helping pupils develop good morals	Helping pupils understand their and other people's religion	
Type of School	Government	0	5	15	20
	Grant-Aided	1	5	3	9
	CDSS	1	5	13	19
	Private	0	1	4	5
Total		2	16	35	53

Table A8.4: Understanding of how the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change should be implemented

		Understanding of how the dual-mode RE curriculum policy should be implemented				Total
		Pupils should take either BK or RME as optional	Pupils can take both BK and RME	Schools should offer either BK or RME as optional	Schools should offer either BK and RME as compulsory	
Type of School	Government	9	6	4	1	20
	Grant-Aided	4	1	3	1	9
	CDSS	8	4	4	3	19
	Private	1	1	2	1	5
Total		22	12	13	6	53

Table A8.5: School's decision in implementing the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum policy change

		School's decision in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum			Total
		Offering BK and RME	Offering BK only	Offering RME only	
Type of School	Government	7	12	1	20
	Grant-Aided	1	8	0	9
	CDSS	6	12	1	19
	Private	2	3	0	5
Total		16	35	2	53

Table A8.6: School staffing level for Religious Education teachers

		School staffing level for RE teachers				Total
		Sufficient teachers for both BK & RME	Sufficient teachers for BK	Sufficient teachers for RME	Lack of teachers for RE	
Type of School	Government	6	8	1	4	19
	Grant-Aided	1	8	0	0	9
	CDSS	4	12	0	2	18
	Private	2	3	0	0	5
Total		13	31	1	6	51

Table A8.7: **Parents' or community's interference with the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum implementation**

	Whether parents or the community interfere in the dual-mode RE curriculum implementation		Total
	Yes	No	Yes
Type of School Government	4	16	20
Grant-Aided	3	6	9
CDSS	5	14	19
Private	2	3	5
Total	14	39	53

Table A8.8: **What the teaching of the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum is most likely to promote?**

	What the teaching of both BK and RME is most likely to promote				Total
	Promoting tolerance among different faiths	Promoting disunity among different faiths	Leading learners to a confession of faith	Leading learners to a clear understanding of religion	
Type of School Government	10	1	0	9	20
Grant-Aided	5	1	0	3	9
CDSS	15	0	2	2	19
Private	3	0	0	2	5
Total	33	2	2	16	53

Table A8.9: **Ambiguity created by the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum**

		On whether inclusion of BK & RME in school curriculum has created ambiguity for RE					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	
Type of School	Government	3	8	2	4	3	20
	Grant-Aided	3	3	1	1	1	9
	CDSS	5	5	1	4	4	19
	Private	1	1	0	2	1	5
Total		12	17	4	11	9	53

Table A8.10: Problem affecting the school most in implementing the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum

		Problem affecting school most in implementing the dual-mode RE curriculum					Total
		Lack of RE teachers	Lack of teaching materials for RE	Lack of INSET of RE teachers	Unwillingness to teach BK and RME at the same school	Perception of Multi-faith RE as islamisation of the country	
Type of School	Government	3	2	8	4	3	20
	Grant-Aided	0	2	4	2	1	9
	CDSS	5	2	2	3	6	18
	Private	1	0	3	0	1	5
Total		9	6	17	9	11	52

Table A8.11: How faith-communities influence the implementation of the dual-mode RE curriculum in the school

		How faith communities are influencing the practice of the dual mode RE curriculum in the school				Total
		Christians support BK while Muslims support RME	Both Christians and Muslims don't want RE in schools	Christians and Muslims want to use RE for faith	Christians and Muslims support RE for educational reasons	
Type of School	Government	13	1	5	0	19
	Grant-Aided	5	0	3	1	9
	CDSS	13	3	2	0	18
	Private	5	0	0	0	5
Total		36	4	10	1	51

Table A8.12: Perceptions regarding the policy and praxis of the dual-mode Religious Education curriculum

		Perceptions regarding the policy and praxis of the dual-mode RE curriculum				Total
		An over-burden to schools to teach both BK and RME	BK is for Christians and RME is for Muslims	Only BK should be taught as Malawi is mainly Christian	Conflict between religious and educational reasons	
Type of School	Government	5	8	1	6	20
	Grant-Aided	4	3	2	0	9
	CDSS	3	7	2	7	19
	Private	1	1	1	2	5
Total		13	19	6	15	53

Table A8.13: Dual-mode RE curriculum as based on Malawi's political need to maintain peace

		RE curriculum being based on Malawi's political need to maintain peace					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	
Type of School	Government	12	6	2	0	0	20
	Grant-Aided	4	0	2	1	2	9
	CDSS	2	8	2	3	4	19
	Private	1	1	1	1	1	5
Total		19	15	7	5	7	53

Table A8.14: Textbooks received for BK and RME from Ministry of Education

		Text books for BK and RME from Ministry of Education		Total
		Yes	No	Yes
Type of School	Government	7	13	20
	Grant-Aided	2	7	9
	CDSS	7	12	19
	Private	2	3	5
Total		18	35	53

Table A8.15: RE school visits by curriculum planners and methods advisors

		RE school visits by curriculum planners and methods advisors		Total
		Yes	No	Yes
Type of School	Government	6	14	20
	Grant-Aided	0	9	9
	CDSS	2	17	19
	Private	0	5	5
Total		8	45	53

Table A8.16: In-service training for RE teachers by Ministry of Education

		In-service training for RE teachers by Ministry of Education	Total
		No	No
Type of School	Government	19	19
	Grant-Aided	9	9
	CDSS	18	18
	Private	5	5
Total		51	51

Appendix 9: Circular Letter by Malawi's Ministry of Education Announcing the Dual-Mode Religious Education Curriculum Policy Change

THE SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ref. No. SY/1/9   25TH May, 2001

To: All Government Secondary Schools, Grant-Aided Secondary Schools,
    Community Day Secondary Schools, Private Secondary Schools.
    Episcopal Conference of Malawi
    Malawi Council of Churches
    Muslim Association of Malawi
    Seventh Day Adventist Church of Malawi
    The Dean, Faculty of Education, Chancellor College
    The Dean, Faculty of Education, Mzuzu University
    The Principal, Domasi College of Education
    The Director, Malawi Institute of Education
    The Executive Director, MANEB
    Education Division Managers (NED, CEED, CWED, SEED, SWED & SHED)
    All District Education Offices
    Private secondary Schools Association of Malawi (PRISAM)

RE: JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION AND BIBLE KNOWLEDGE.

You may wish to recall that there was a directive to withhold the implementation of junior secondary school Religious and Moral Education Syllabus. The directive further recommended the formation of a National Consultative Committee, comprising of all stakeholders involved in the teaching of religious education in secondary schools in the country, to deliberate on the introduction of the new Religious and Moral Education (RME), which was to replace Bible Knowledge (BK) according to the new Junior Secondary Curriculum. This directive was made in response to complaints from some religious organizations that they were not consulted when the decision to introduce Religious and Moral Education and remove Bible Knowledge was made.

I am pleased to inform you that the consultative committee finally resolved that a revised Religious and Moral Education and a revised Bible Knowledge be offered as optional subjects in Government, Grant-aided and Private schools and that all schools shall observe the right of the student/learner and /or indeed of his/her parent to choose the religious instruction subject of his/her choice as provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi and the Education Act.

You may also wish to be informed that it is not possible to process the 2001 Bible Knowledge examinations, because of logistical, financial, moral as well as possible legal point of implications. These two subjects will therefore be examined in 2002. Schools are therefore informed that the two subjects can be introduced as options starting with the current form one.

Head teachers are strongly advised not to force any pupil to study any of these subjects without consent of the pupil.

I should be very grateful if the contents of this letter will be made known to all members of staff and pupils.

T.R. O'Dala

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BA. UHDE. BA Hons. MA. Cert in Computer Studies

Tel: (031) 7083508 Cell: 084 4020251

Appendix 10: Professional Editor's Note

This is to verify that I have reviewed and edited the thesis of Macloud Frank Salanjira,
CONTESTING SPACES IN CURRICULUM POLICY CHANGE: EXPLORING THE
DUAL-MODE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
MALAWI.

Any substantive changes made, are made only to clarify the meaning, NOT to change the
meaning.

The student has engaged my services as editor for the purposes of examining and
correcting the technical aspects of the work. It is assumed that at this stage the student's
supervisor(s) has sufficiently examined the thesis and advised the student with reference
to research, research methodology, data generation, reporting, knowledge production and
content. It is also assumed that the student is sufficiently proficient in these matters. The
editor waives any claim of responsibility regarding the student's research, research
methodology, data generation, reporting of data, knowledge production and content, and
cannot be held accountable for an examiner's assessment of the student's effort.

Yours faithfully

_____

S. M. Ramson
(Signed)