

# **Training Teachers Through The Distance Mode: The Experience Of Domasi College of Education In Malawi**

**Elias Chakwera & Francis Saiti**

Domasi College of Education

P.O. Box 49, Domasi, Malawi

E-mail: [sstep@sdp.org.mw](mailto:sstep@sdp.org.mw)

## **Abstract**

The distance teacher education program offered by Domasi College of Education is the first of its kind at the secondary teacher education level in Malawi. It is an innovation within the government's broad aim of increasing access and reducing disparity in secondary education. With the introduction of this program, Domasi college has become a dual mode institution because it delivers two programs through different modes. This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities of this arrangement within the context of the country's needs for teachers. Specifically, the paper examines the opportunities of increased access to higher education and attainment of equity. It is argued that improvement of teacher quality can enhance the quality of education offered in the less privileged Community Day Secondary Schools. Based on the findings of a comparative study of the conventional and distance education programs operating within the College, the paper dispels the fears that were expressed earlier that distance teacher education would adversely affect teacher quality. However, in spite of its potential to increase access, retain quality and reduce gender disparity, the distance education

program continues to be marginalized within the dual mode operation. It is finally argued that the success of distance education program depends on improved perception, more commitment from all stakeholders as well as appropriate training.

## **Introduction**

Malawi is a small country in the southern sub-region of the African continent, covering the area of 119,140 square kilometers, of which 20% is water. The country lies between 9 degrees and 17 degrees south of the Equator. Malawi shares boundaries with Tanzania to the north and north- east, Zambia to the west and Mozambique to the south, east and west. The population of Malawi is currently estimated at 11 million people and about 46% of the population consists of children and youth under the age of 15 years (MOE and UNICEF, 1998).

The current government commitment is to improve the quantity and quality of social services as a means of reaching the overall objective of poverty reduction. This is evident in the introduction of the Free Primary Education in 1994. In this respect Education gets 28% of the recurrent national expenditure, which is the highest allocation from the state budget.

## **Education System**

The education system consists of three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. In terms of the number of years, the system is structured as follows:

Fig. 1 Structure of the Education System and Years Spent at School

| Primary         | Secondary            | Tertiary                   |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|                 | Com. Day Sec. School | 13 14 T3/T2 Teacher Train. |
|                 | 9 10 11 12           | 13 14 15 16 Tech. Ed.      |
|                 | Conventional         | 13 14 15 Univ. Diploma     |
|                 | Sec. Education       |                            |
| 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 | 9 10 11 12           | 13 14 15 16/17 Degree      |

Source: MOE & UNICEF, 1998 P.6.

Like most developing countries, Malawi follows an elitist system of education with a focus on theory and examinations that assess mostly cognitive achievement. Of the pupils who complete primary education, only 26% enter the secondary education sector.

For the purposes of selection, secondary schools are currently classified into three categories: National secondary schools, which are well established and resourced; District Secondary schools, which rank second in terms of resources and are meant for students within the district; Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS), which originally operated as distance education centers until 1998. These are the most poorly resourced schools and are meant for pupils of the local communities. The schools are

lacking in qualified teachers as well as teaching and learning materials and physical facilities. However, of the population of pupils attending secondary education nearly 70% are registered in the CDSSs. In the 2001 selection, of the 26% that went to secondary schools, 21% were offered places in the CDSSs (Chakwera, Khembo, & Sireci, 2002).

For the university education, only about 0.3% of the pupils who complete secondary education are admitted. Those who do not make it to the university, end up in other tertiary institutions for a variety of vocations. The majority of those who attend the CDSSs do not compete favorably for places in the tertiary education sector because they often obtain poor results in national examinations. As distance education centers, they were only successful in increasing access but were grossly ineffective in getting pupils to pass the national examinations (Chimwenje, 1998). This ineffectiveness is apparent in the CDSSs because the distance education centers only acquired a new name within the same operational resources.

### **The Role of Distance Education In Teacher Training**

Recognizing the serious shortage of qualified teachers staffing in the CDSSs, which have only 7% of qualified teachers (see Table 2), Domasi college of Education introduced an upgrading course for Primary school teachers deployed in the CDSSs to diploma in education. This is an innovation that was initially supported by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), which provided technical advice and funded the training of writers for the development of the first modules. The Canadian International Agency (CIDA) is currently funding the implementation of the distance education

program through the Secondary School Teacher Education Project (SSTEP) under the management of the Hickling Corporation.

The introduction of the distance education program paralleling the regular diploma in education program was a bold step. Until this attempt in 1999, the training of secondary school teachers in Malawi had been done through the conventional face-to-face mode in the university colleges. There were fears that such a move would affect teacher quality. The fears were founded on experiences with the distance education program at the secondary school level which were characterized by high failing rates in national examinations.

However, with the support of cooperating partners and government, Domasi College went ahead with the introduction of the distance education program, which has since registered 600 teacher-learners. This decision was made in the interest of the ever-increasing shortfall of teachers in the secondary school sub-sector. The teacher shortage is illustrated by the data in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Teacher Demand Statistics

| School Type  | # Teachers teaching | # Qualified Teachers | # Teachers Unqualified |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Government   | 633                 | 527                  | 91                     |
| Grant- Aided | 350                 | 170                  | 180                    |
| CDSS         | 2884                | 218                  | 2762                   |
| Private      | 262                 | 106                  | 178                    |
| Total        | 4129                | 1121                 | 3100                   |

Source: MOE, 2001 P 15.

The numbers in Table 2 show the shortfall in terms of trained against untrained teachers employed. It is silent on the teaching posts that have never been filled because of lack of personnel to take up the posts. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (2000) estimated the total teacher demand to be approximately 11,500 when attrition rate and secondary school growth rates are considered.

### **Factors on the shortfall of teachers in the secondary education system**

The shortfall of teachers has been on the rise due to three factors:

- a. Teacher supply has remained low in spite of expansion taking place in the secondary school sub-sector. At present the estimated annual output of all colleges together is about 350. It has been impossible for the training institutions to increase their output due to limited bed-space and lack of financial resources to support recurrent expenditures.
- b. There has been rapid expansion of the secondary education sector over the past ten years when private providers were allowed to open their schools and Distance Education Centers were converted into community day secondary schools.
- c. The education sector as a whole has remained unattractive to personnel and so it continues to face high attrition. It is estimated that at least five percent of those that graduate with teaching qualifications in a year join other jobs, and teacher annual attrition rate is estimated at about 15 %, including those dying due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic (MOESC, 2000).

In view of these problems, which exacerbate the teacher shortage, the distance education program seems to be the best tool to bring down the shortage. In the two years of the project's operations, the College has been able to increase its annual intake from 180 to nearly 914 because the distance education program has recruited at least 734 teacher- learners in the two years of its operation. With this development, the output of Domasi College alone is more than what all colleges are offering together through their regular programs.

### **Advantages of the SSTEP Program**

There are some noticeable advantages for this program which should be highlighted or registered in a country stricken by critical teacher shortage as is Malawi:

- a. Teachers pursue their studies without withdrawing their services, as it tends to be the case when serving teachers are admitted in a conventional face-to-face program. In the present context, the withdrawal of 734 teachers would have aggravated an already worsened situation in the CDSSs.
- b. Teachers on training have an immediate opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills that they learn because they are in contact with students on a daily basis. This has an immediate impact on the quality of teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom.
- c. The increase in enrolment did not need a corresponding increase in teaching personnel or bed space, which could have more than trebled the running cost to the institution. As a special case, it has been possible to considerably increase the intake of women to 312 against 150 bed- spaces provided for them. The women's enrolment represent 43% of the distance education program enrolment. This represents a big stride in ensuring women's participation in teacher training at a higher level. The conventional program only admits 27%.
- d. The home study provision has enabled pre- natal and ante- natal mothers to pursue their studies without disruptions while students in similar conditions in the regular program tend to be withdrawn on health grounds. There is no doubt that this program offers an opportunity to remove the gender disparities that have characterized the Malawi education system, especially at higher levels.

- e. The distance education program is a sure way of increasing access to higher education in a country where the greater part of its limited resources are spent for the benefit of the majority in basic education. Secondary and higher education are increasingly getting less support for physical facilities expansion.
- f. The program provides for flexibility in the progress of teacher-learners because it is not tied to the fixed calendar of an academic year. For example, if the teacher-learners for some reason have not been able to complete courses, they may be allowed to take extra courses in addition to those uncompleted as they move to the next segment of the program. Or if for some reasons, the teacher-learners withdraw from active studies, they can pick it up from where they stopped whenever they want to resume the studies. In the conventional program, the current practice is that such students would normally be made to repeat the whole year because there are no provisions for students to join the program at any other time rather than the beginning of an academic year.
- g. Faculty members have acquired hands-on-experience and an understanding of the problems, prospects and challenges of distance education. It has especially been rewarding to acquire skills in materials development for distance learners that will go along way in their professional growth.

### **Challenges of The Distance Education Program**

The implementation of distance education program at Domasi College of Education has met several challenges, especially with respect to quality assurance, human resources, and perceptions.

### Quality assurance concerns

The major concern of those who opposed the introduction of Distance Education for teachers was its potential to dilute quality. It was argued that the teachers that would be trained through this method would not match their counterparts in the conventional program. With the experience of the MCDE described earlier in this paper, these concerns were quite pertinent. In addition, the country was experiencing another poorly coordinated Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher program (MIITEP) (MOESC, 2000). In view of this concern, the college has attempted to match its parallel programs in a number of ways:

#### Selection

The target group for the distance education program is Trained Primary School teachers with T2 certificates who are presently teaching in CDSSs. While in principle any member of this group qualifies, it was necessary to select those to be admitted following the criteria approved by the University of Malawi Senate, which is the accrediting institution. As is the case in the regular program, qualifying candidates must have four credit passes including English in their Malawi School Certificate Examinations (MSCE-O level equivalent). A slight departure from the regular program was that the teacher-learners in the distance education program do not need an aggregate of ten points for the two teaching subjects they choose to study, as is the case with the regular program. This change enables those with aggregates higher than ten points to get access to higher education. At present there are about 60% who would have been denied access to diploma if the regular program ten-point criterion been used in the distance program.

However, the short-listed candidates still take aptitude tests in Communication, Numerical Skills, and Reasoning Skills as their conventional program counterparts, and those who are top- ranked get selected.

All this is done to ensure that only the most deserving candidates, in terms of academic qualification, get a chance. Those who have taught in CDSS for a number of years but fail to meet the academic criteria are not considered in this program. In a way, this selection procedure perpetuates the elitist nature of our education system where experience does not really count to enter higher education. However, the selection process ensures credibility of the program as it establishes parallel links with the regular program.

#### Course content

As a parallel program, the distance education curriculum is not different from the one used for the conventional program. All course outlines of the subjects offered by the college were modularized to develop the teaching materials for the distance education program. The academic staff members who teach the courses were asked to write the modules after some training in writing for the distance mode. In this way, the distance program satisfied another conditionality for a parallel program of teaching the same curriculum.

#### Residential Teaching

In a six- week session annually, the teacher-learners are brought together in face-to-face contact with the college staff. During these sessions, lecturers attend to potentially difficult topics to help students with what is expected of them. In sciences,

most of the residential time is devoted to practical work associated with the content of the modules. These sessions help to build confidence in both the learners and the general public about the authenticity of the diploma program offered through the distance mode. The face-to-face contact between the distance learners and the academic staff members who teach the regular program is going a long way in establishing the equivalence of the two programs offered by the same institution. By the end of these sessions, teacher-learners become more determined to manage the rest of the work on their own.

#### Assessment

As is the case with the conventional program, student performance is evaluated at two stages namely: continuous assessment and final evaluation that is composed of End of Course examinations. The continuous assessment (formative) comprises written assignments and short tests administered during a residential session. But the end-of-course examinations (summative) are administered twice annually, in April and July/August, parallel to end of semester examinations in the conventional program. These end-of-course examinations are prepared by the academic staff of Domasi College at the same time they set papers for their regular students to ensure comparable standards. The same External Examiners are used to moderate re-score sampled scripts from the two tests to ensure that they are of comparable standards.

While using the same test for the two groups would be ideal, it has not been tried because of logistical constraints. It is not possible to have the two groups together in the college to take examinations because of numbers. And to establish several centers at the

same time would raise test administration costs to unbearable levels. The College is, however, satisfied that the tests are parallel and their results are comparable.

An internal study that compared performance of the two groups in various subjects revealed that the teacher- learners performed just as well as conventional students and, in some cases, they did better than the regular students. We compared the two programmes on the two semester assessments for the first cohort of the program. The following is the summary of the comparison:

#### Methods

A comparison test on the first and second semester results were conducted. The whole group consisted of 294 students (102 females and 192 males) in the distance program and 175 students (39 females and 136 males) in the conventional program. A *t*-test analysis was performed on the grades of the first and second semesters of 2001/2002 academic year in the courses of the following subjects: Biology, Human Ecology, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics in the science program and History, Geography, Theology & Religious Studies, Linguistics, English and Education in the humanities program. The means for each course were compared at  $p=0.5$ . This comparison was done to find out whether there is a difference between the performances of the two groups.

#### Results

The results for the first semester show that 60% of the courses are not significantly different at the .05 alpha level. But in 40 % of the differences between the two groups are significant as illustrated in table 3.

Table 3

| Course   | DISTANCE PROGRAM        |      |                    | CONVENTIONAL PROGRAM |      |                    | t-Test Significance at 0.05 level |
|----------|-------------------------|------|--------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
|          | No. of Teacher Learners | Mean | Standard deviation | Number of Candidates | Mean | Standard deviation |                                   |
| BIO 100A | 31                      | 47.0 | 9.70               | 31                   | 48.5 | 9.80               | NOT significantly different       |
| CHE 100A | 11                      | 51.3 | 10.30              | 31                   | 55.1 | 10.20              | NOT significantly different       |
| HEC 100A | 28                      | 57.4 | 9.30               | 18                   | 61.1 | 7.50               | NOT significantly different       |
| HEC 110A | 28                      | 53.5 | 9.80               | 18                   | 63.5 | 5.80               | Significantly different           |
| MAT 100A | 35                      | 51.3 | 10.10              | 31                   | 47.9 | 10.80              | NOT significantly different       |
| PHY 100A | 11                      | 49.1 | 16.30              | 31                   | 55.4 | 10.60              | Significantly different           |
| ENG 100A | 131                     | 64.5 | 9.50               | 75                   | 56.5 | 7.00               | Significantly different           |
| ENG 110A | 131                     | 53.0 | 7.40               | 76                   | 52.4 | 7.10               | NOT significantly different       |
| LAL 100A | 103                     | 53.2 | 11.80              | 72                   | 53.9 | 9.40               | NOT significantly different       |
| LAL 110  | 106                     | 52.2 | 7.90               | 71                   | 53.8 | 7.30               | NOT significantly different       |
| GEO 100A | 92                      | 56.7 | 8.30               | 40                   | 59.6 | 7.70               | NOT significantly different       |
| GEO 110A | 92                      | 49.2 | 10.70              | 40                   | 57.2 | 9.70               | Significantly different           |
| HIS 100A | 71                      | 47.3 | 6.90               | 29                   | 48.7 | 10.10              | NOT significantly different       |
| HIS 110  | 71                      | 50.0 | 8.00               | 29                   | 53.6 | 6.40               | Significantly different           |
| TRS 100  | 87                      | 57.5 | 6.30               | 37                   | 51.4 | 9.10               | Significantly different           |
| TRS 110A | 87                      | 51.6 | 5.60               | 37                   | 51.5 | 8.50               | NOT significantly different       |
| EDU 100A | 294                     | 50.6 | 8.50               | 175                  | 57.8 | 6.20               | Significantly different           |

Number of courses = 17, Sig. = 40% (Hum.= 45%, Sci. = 33%)

For the second semester it is observed that in 44% of the courses, there is no significant difference in students' performance in the two programs at the .05, alpha-level. This means that in 56% of the courses, there is significance difference between the two programs. This is illustrated in table 4 as follows:

Table 4

**COMPARISON OF EXAMS RESULTS OF SECOND SEMESTER**

| Course    | DISTANCE PROGRAM        |       |                    | CONVENTIONAL PROGRAM |       |                    | t-Test Significance at 0.05 level |
|-----------|-------------------------|-------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
|           | No. of Teacher Learners | Mean  | Standard deviation | Number of candidates | Mean  | Standard deviation |                                   |
| BIO 100B  | 31                      | 60.3  | 8.48               | 45                   | 54    | 6.23               | NOT Significantly different       |
| CHE 100B  | 11                      | 50    | 7.77               | 30                   | 54.24 | 8.93               | NOT Significantly different       |
| HEC 100B  | 26                      | 58.69 | 9.72               | 18                   | 60.33 | 6.28               | NOT Significantly different       |
| HEC 110B  | 26                      | 60.69 | 12.05              | 18                   | 49.28 | 6.23               | Significantly different           |
| MAT 100B  | 35                      | 58.71 | 12.31              | 45                   | 55.42 | 12.07              | NOT Significantly different       |
| PHY 100B  | 11                      | 49.82 | 7.81               | 30                   | 53.3  | 10.1               | NOT Significantly different       |
| ENG 100B  | 134                     | 57.77 | 9.68               | 84                   | 61.48 | 9.12               | Significantly different           |
| ENG 110B  | 134                     | 54.55 | 8.72               | 84                   | 59.24 | 10.41              | Significantly different           |
| LAL 100B  | 103                     | 60.82 | 11.61              | 76                   | 58.88 | 9.56               | NOT Significantly different       |
| LAL 110B  | 103                     | 62.52 | 6.8                | 76                   | 58.87 | 7.3                | Significantly different           |
| GEO 100B  | 91                      | 61.68 | 6.94               | 48                   | 56.56 | 5.53               | Significantly different           |
| GEO 110B  | 91                      | 57.63 | 7.57               | 48                   | 61.88 | 5.88               | Significantly different           |
| HIST 100B | 71                      | 53.08 | 6.38               | 31                   | 55.29 | 7.64               | NOT Significantly different       |
| HIST 110B | 71                      | 59.62 | 6.71               | 31                   | 56.16 | 6.19               | Significantly different           |
| TRS 100B  | 85                      | 52.24 | 11.22              | 40                   | 59.5  | 6.92               | Significantly different           |
| TRS 110B  | 86                      | 59.92 | 10.86              | 40                   | 51.8  | 6.24               | Significantly different           |
| EDU 100B  | 293                     | 54.35 | 7.05               | 200                  | 59.12 | 4.7                | Significantly different           |

N= 17, Sig. = 56% (Hum. 72%, Sci. = 9 %)

#### Interpretation:

In both semesters significant differences between the means of the two programs were observed in a number of subject areas. In the first semester, teacher learners performed better than the conventional students in ENG 100A and TRS 100A and the conventional students did better than the teacher- learners in HEC 100A, PHY 100A, GEO 110 and EDU 100A. But in the second semester, Teacher- learners did better than conventional students in HEC 110B, LAL 110B, GEO 100B, HIST 110B and TRS 110B.

On the other hand, conventional students did better than the distance education learners in ENG 100B, ENG 110, GEO 110B, TRS100B, and EDU 100B.

There is no pattern of consistently better performance for any of the two groups to justify superiority of any program over the other. In fact, such a conclusion may not be appropriate since the subjects were not randomly assigned to the programs. It is however, sufficient to say that the two programs are comparable in terms of quality. The fact that any of the two groups can do better than the other in any subjects on examinations of comparable standards, is enough evidence to support that distance education program can sufficiently provide quality training. Therefore, we can conclude that the distance education program at Domasi College of Education is not different from its conventional counterpart. And we have no doubt that the two programs are offering comparable qualifications in spite of the differences in the mode of delivery. So far, the program seems to be on the right track in meeting the quality demands with respect to curricular delivery.

#### Human Resources Concerns

Regarding the human resources concerns, the problem is basically that the distance education program is operating within an existing staff establishment that was meant for a single program. There are full- time staff members who work for the project on routine issues such as record updates, management and administrative matters such as coordination of module writing, field supervision and financial transactions. But the teaching staff members of Domasi College do all academic work, and they are paid modest allowances for the work they do.

From the onset, the program was perceived as an overload to the staff who felt already overstretched by the regular program. While it has been possible to get academic staff members to work on the project with money incentives, this has guaranteed neither the needed staff commitment nor project ownership. It is clear from the academic staff members' reactions that their commitment is to the regular program, and the distance education program is still considered something extra.

For students' support in the field, the project has engaged retired teachers as supervisors to advise the teacher-learners on their professional needs. Each Supervisor is assigned not more than 15 teacher-learners within a cluster or a zone of schools. Maintaining the Supervisors' salaries and their travel expenses is only manageable now while the program is running as a sponsored project. It will certainly raise sustainability problem when external funding phases out.

#### Perception Concerns

In a country with a long tradition of face-to-face training of teachers, distance education has been received with mixed feelings. Many times it is seen as the second-best meant for those who missed it the first time. Some have shared a feeling that the program is face-saving for the educational crisis experienced in the country and is equivalent to MIITEP, a course that has been offered for the primary school teachers since the introduction of the Free Primary Education in 1994. This hostility however, is not strange because the distance education that is known in Malawi has been associated with those who were rejected in selection and poor national examination results.

Even within the higher education institutions in Malawi, distance education is regarded as second best. Again this is not surprising because the University of Malawi

has never offered a full- fledged distance education program. It may therefore, take sometime for some people to accept the qualifications obtained through the distance mode. However, it is pleasing that the University of Malawi, as an accrediting institution, has approved the program.

### **Future Directions**

So far SSTEP has made satisfactory progress in implementing the distance education program at Domasi College of Education in Malawi. Some of the lessons pointing to future directions of distance education in Malawi relate to the following areas:

#### Institutionalization

Although the program is operating within the premises of Domasi, it is not fully institutionalized. It operates more like an independent project and only benefits from hiring staff services. In anticipation of the phasing out of the project, there is need to work out a plan for the systematic incorporation of distance education into the institutional programs. One way of doing this is to create a Center for Continuing Studies and Distance Education with a focus on teacher professional development. Such a center would also serve as a contact point with the schools because of the data that would continually be available through interactions with teacher- learners. This arrangement shall also be able to enhance research in teacher development and school improvement. This can keep the College abreast with the developments relating to curricular implementation in schools. In this way, the distance education program will facilitate improvement in the regular program, which in turn will make the dual approaches complementary.

## Training

There has been no training to the level of professional specialization in distance education at Domasi College of Education. This deficiency deprives the program a professional base and ownership. The short- term training workshops focusing on materials development only provide the technical know- how without professional grounding in a theoretical framework. Yet governments and Cooperating partners are quick to invest in short- term workshops for their immediate potential rather than in long- term studies. It should, however, be remembered that professional expertise is key to the success of any program in an institution of higher learning.

Domasi College needs a cadre of distance education professionals if the program has to survive the test of time in an institution characterized by academic specialization. Both the Malawi government and its Cooperating partners, such as COL and CIDA, need to consider long term training more seriously if program sustainability is to be ensured. This is the sure way of guaranteeing staff commitment and increasing their vision for the development of distance education in the country as a whole.

## Stakeholder Participation and Commitment

At present Domasi College staff and CIDA- SSTEP are the only players in the activities of the distance education program. The project is paying for almost everything and student contribution is not officially documented, let alone the contribution of the Ministry of Education. This is not healthy for program sustainability. There is need for government to come up with strategies that will ensure smooth transition from the project

to institutionalization when external funding is phased out. As of now, government subvention and student contribution should be instituted and documented to ensure commitment of all stakeholders of the program.

### Curriculum Shift

The distance education program that Domasi College of Education is offering is aimed at improving teaching and learning in the CDSSs and yet it is parallel to the ordinary teacher preparation program. As such its curriculum has been less classroom friendly and more academically inclined. The curriculum should have focused more on the teachers' immediate needs in terms of practical issues rather than leaning on the academic advancement of the teacher. For example, greater weight in assessment should have been put on portfolios that show application of what the teacher- learners do as they combine studies and teaching, rather on the tests which come only once at the end of the course. Too much emphasis on examinations may cause a temporary withdraw of service from the classroom as examinations approach. This may have an undesirable effect on the very pupils for whom this program is intended. It is necessary to conduct a study on how teacher professional development can be best integrated with academic advancement in a distance education program. This is especially important in a dual mode situation, as is the case at Domasi College. There is need to explore ways of ensuring immediate impact of such programs on the secondary school students.

## **Conclusion**

Training of quality teachers through distance education is possible at any level. The distance mode of training is a sure way of increasing teacher supply, as well as increasing access to higher teacher qualifications in developing countries with limited resources for physical expansions of the education systems. There is, however, need for a curriculum that appropriately balances teacher professional growth with a focus on classroom demands and teacher academic advancement to higher qualifications. The essence of distance education program for teacher upgrading should not lose focus of the school pupils who are the ultimate beneficiaries of such efforts and innovations in education. In the Malawi context, it is evident that the success of the distance teacher education program will be measured by its impact on CDSS students' achievement on national examinations. Unless this ultimate objective is achieved, the education system shall remain a symbol of disparity in quality, in spite of observed increased access to secondary education represented by the CDSS places.

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