

MALAWI COLLEGE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION TO MOVE TO RESOURCE-BASED OPEN LEARNING

By:

C. F. Laymaman

Senior Producer (editor)

Malawi College of Distance Education

Private Bag 302

Chichiri, Blantyre 3

Malawi

Tel. (265) 670 088, Fax (265) 677452

The College: historical background

The College, since it was established in 1965 under the corporate name of **Malawi Correspondence College** (MCC) and **Schools Broadcasting Unit** (SBU), was given the responsibility to provide education by distance to students who could not attend conventional schools for various reasons. In 1972, the two units merged and the name of the College was changed to Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE).

The College opened with 1,425 students, 26 members of staff and a handful of teacher-supervisors drawn from the primary school sector. Today it has more than 150,000 active students, 130 employees, 2,500 teacher-supervisors working in more than 520 distance education centres (DECs) and 44 night secondary schools (NSS). These students study either for *Malawi School Certificate of Education* (MSCE), *Junior Certificate* (JC) or *Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education* (PSLCE) courses. MCDE has home study students in all the districts. It has two regional offices, one in the North and the other in the Centre. The headquarters in the Southern region provides regional services in the south.

DECs are institutions set up by communities to provide face-to-face component in distance education (DE). The instructions include supervision of students, counselling and time to listen to radio programmes in groups. These DECs are in two groups. Some operate in their own premises and others in borrowed premises, ie. primary school buildings. Their resources vary depending on who provided them, a donor, an agency or the community itself. Some DECs provide boarding facilities to allow many student access education. (The boarding facilities are also to be gradually phased out beginning 1998)

Currently these DECs are not following the principles and practices of DE and they face a lot of problems, some of which are lack of proper educational facilities such as distance study materials, qualified supervisors, science equipment, proper infrastructures. The communities, however, without understanding the philosophy of DE, demand that their children receive direct instructions as are students in conventional school.

The difference between DECs and conventional secondary schools is, DECs are institutions set up and managed by the communities. They raise their own funds to run their programmes, such as attending meetings on curriculum management, development, teaching, etc. They receive their instructional materials from MCDE. These materials are inadequate as MCDE's budget is not sufficient to cater for high enrolment in the DECs. The DECs do not have libraries to supplement distance study materials, although, sometimes they can borrow books from the under resourced National Library. Furthermore, they are staffed with under qualified teacher-supervisors, ie. not oriented in the principles and practices of DE.

On the other hand, secondary schools are set up, funded and managed by the Government through the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture which has education divisions and district education offices. They have the necessary teaching and learning facilities which include laboratories, science equipment, textbooks and libraries and are staffed with qualified teachers for the secondary education curriculum.

MCDE's organisational structure

MCDE is a department of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. It is headed by a principal who reports to the secretary for education through a desk officer or sometimes directly. The College has eight sections: tutorial/editorial, print, schools broadcasting unit, student services, computer services, accounts, research and evaluation (disbanded) and registry. It has two regional offices and under each regional office are DECs, NSS and home study students.

The DECs are managed by DEC management committees with the teacher-in-charge as an ex-officio member of the committee. The DEC management committee deals with:

- development projects for the DEC
- management of the DEC including funds
- some discipline cases

The teachers-in-charge is responsible for DEC management as far curriculum issues are concerned. They ensure that students receive instructions. They report to the DEO for administrative matters and for curriculum issues. They report to the principal through the regional offices. This arrangement will soon be phased out because they will now only report to the DEOs who report to education divisional managers, who in turn report to the Ministry headquarters.

DEC teacher-supervisors

DEC teacher-supervisors are drawn from the primary education sector and belong to the district education officers' (DEO) quotas. Most of them have difficulties in handling the senior secondary school curriculum because they lack academic and professional qualifications and skills in:

- Academic subjects they handle
- Knowledge in education for development
- Communication, principles and practices of DE
- Planning and administration in DE
- Student support in DE
- The role of teacher-supervisors in DE.
- Learning and teaching in DE

MCDE students

MCDE provides education services to three types of students:

- DEC students, ie. those that attend regular lectures in distance education centres (100,000)
- NSS students (45,000)
- Home study students (about 5,000)

Enrolment in DECs

The table below shows the statistics of DEC students in each form:

Form	I	II	III	IV
Boys	24,136	19,947	11,468	10,994
Girls	13,716	11,332	5,645	5,100
Totals	37,852	31,279	17,113	16,094

Fees

DEC students pay tuition fees depending on the number of subjects they take. The fees range between K50 (US\$1.19) and K70 (US\$1.67). However, students also pay other centre funds, and where students have to pay boarding fees they may pay as much as K1,300 (US\$31.00) or more per term.

Secondary education is free for girls through Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) project with funds from US AID. Each female student gets MK440 (US\$10.48) per annum which is a full tuition fee for a student in conventional secondary schools. In boarding DEC's girls pay the difference.

Examinations

All students, ie. distance education and conventional school students, sit the same examinations set by the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB). For the past five years MCDE candidates in the Malawi School Certificate of Education have been doing badly. Just as other institutions, the performance has dropped as is evidenced in the MSCE examination results which have been declining steadily. The worst years were 1996 and 1997 when the pass rates for MSCE candidates were 11.22% and 9.3% respectively. However, the Junior Certificate students have been doing well. Most DEC's produced pass rates between 60% — 100%. The table below gives the statistics of pass rates of two years for MSCE and JC.

Examination	1996			1997		
	Entered	Pass	%	Entered	Pass	%
MSCE	11,503	1,284	11.2%	14,500	1,363	9.3%
JC	33,560	29,543	88%	40,526	33,898	83.6%

The poor results at MSCE have been explained in various ways:

- DEC's do not have adequate teaching/learning materials
- Teachers in the DEC's are not able to handle MSCE subjects
- Teachers do not have teachers' guides, curriculum guides, syllabuses, and up-to-date books
- Indiscipline cases in the DEC's
- Poor learning conditions
- There is no selection system

Mission statement, objectives, strategies, policy and budget

Mission statement

In 1996, in an effort to provide quality education, MCDE reviewed its mission and resolved that *Malawi College of Distance Education exists to provide alternative formal primary and secondary education of the same standard as offered by conventional schools to students who fail to secure places in the conventional system.*

MCDE, according to its mission, thrived to improve its services to DEC's, NSS and home study students. To achieve its mission, MCDE set the following objectives and strategies:

Objectives

- To improve DEC management
- To improve the learning in DEC's, NSS and for home study students
- To recruit and train tutors/producers for the courses the College offers
- To revise its courses in line with the new curriculum
- To improve distribution of teaching/learning materials
- To procure production equipment: computers, studio and print equipment

These objectives were set when the organisation's education and publishing services began to decline. MCDE's candidates in the public examinations performed poorly. At face value the College seemed to have no concrete mission, objectives, strategies and policy. However, it had an implied mission and explicit. The Government's aim was to make the College an alternative route for the provision of secondary education and its target was to enrol only 9% of the primary graduates. After 20 years of involvement in education, the Government realised that, in reality, distance education offered a relatively inexpensive secondary education but not necessarily cost-effective.

Deductively the mission of the College was to provide an alternative route to secondary schooling and in inference the Government set four objectives for the College. These were to:

- *provide formal education to school going-age children who fail to secure places in the conventional system due to limited space*
- *provide a second chance to adults who missed formal education during their youth*
- *upgrade teachers from T4 to T3 and T3 to T2 (this programme is no longer offered)*
- *prevent a drain of much needed foreign exchange to correspondence colleges in the neighbouring and distant countries.*

The College's strategies in course delivery included:

- *printed instructional materials*
- *radio programmes aired on Mala_i Broadcasting Corporation*
- *face-to-face supervision provided by some selected primary school teachers*

In the 1996 review the College set up the following strategies:

- Improving DEC management by training teachers-in-charge in managerial skills
- recruiting and training tutors/producers in all the subjects
- revising all the outdated course materials
- training and maintaining a pool of professional course/script writer
- procuring dependable and up-to-date equipment
- updating computer services for students services
- upgrading the College library and improving its services by stocking it with new titles and other learning materials
- making the newly established resource centre a unit that can service the DECs in their needs by stocking it with relevant materials
- improving printing services
- carrying out research to identify additional students and teachers' needs in the DECs
- improving the distribution of teaching/learning materials
- Providing facilities for learning, eg. solar energy, science equipment, communication (E-mail)

Although MCDE's mission statement, objectives and strategies were reviewed in 1996 to reflect an aspect of quality and provide relevant programmes using realistic and affordable resources, the College has not managed to improve education in DECs. It is not clear whether MCDE fully understands its mission as an educational organisation with a large secondary education market as well as a publishing house. However, with support from a donor MCDE is carrying out a pilot project to revitalise education in the DECs. In the pilot project, MCDE is moving to a resource-based learning using Open Learning system. The pilot project aims at improving three main areas:

- DEC management
- teaching and learning in the DECs
- materials for the DECs

MCDE plans to design, develop and produce guides for teachers and students to:

- motivate students to learn effectively
- provide an opportunity to students for learning by doing
- provide feedback to students
- help students digest what they learn

It is proposed that students will be learning through:

- lectures provided by trained and oriented teacher-supervisors
- study circles
- library work
- teacher/student consultation

Expected outcomes and priorities

Outcomes

1. Quality and updated instructional material
2. Efficient distribution of teaching/learning materials
3. Quality and efficient print services
4. Availability of instructional materials to students
5. Improved examination results for MSCE
6. Efficient course development
7. Quality and reliable services to students
8. Trained teacher-supervisors

Priorities

MCDE set the following on its priorities

- Procuring production equipment
- Recruiting and training of tutors, producers and editors
- Procuring paper for printing
- Training of a pool of writers
- Developing, revising and producing self-instructional materials (emphasis on MSCE)
- Training of teacher-supervisors for all the DEC's in course delivery
- Supporting course delivery in DEC's and NSS (including solar energy, communication, science equipment)
- Efficient distribution services
- Training of teachers-in-charge in management skills

MCDE has managed to purchase a second hand efficient machine, internally trained 5 tutors including two VSO in course development.

Course development at MCDE

Traditionally MCDE has been developing instructional materials using three main methods.

1. Workshop
2. Full time writers, ie. tutors and producers
3. part-time writers (who can also work within a workshop method)

The College has also been using full-time and part-time editors. The problems experienced with part-time editors included poor quality work and delays.

Developing course materials through workshop method has some setbacks, although the writers who participate in the writing exercises are trained secondary school teachers who, before they begin writing, receive short training in:

1. The principles and practices of distance education
2. The skills and style in DE materials
3. The format, structure and layout of DE instructional materials
4. Objectives, introductions, texts, exercises/answers, summaries and conclusion writing
5. Creation of glossaries or vocabularies
6. Writing skills and styles for MCDE

At MCDE the development of instructional materials is supervised by the principal tutor assisted by the subject tutors, producers and editors. The principal tutor is an academic and administrative officer. His other jobs include administration of DEC teachers and dealing with DEC discipline cases.

Previously writers were asked to look at the syllabus for their subjects and choose a topic from which they would develop a unit for instructional materials. The writers would then select their own learning objectives, establish their own teaching points, select the content, media and media mix. They would then proceed to develop the units and when finished they would submit them to subject tutors or editors. Each

writer was expected to produce at least five units of ten A4 typed pages working eight hours a day for 10 days. The problems experienced from this kind of course development method were many and some of which are:

- lack of coordination of the materials developed
- poor and wild content, ie. not related to the needs of the students
- lack of teaching effectiveness
- lack of proper length
- poor learning objectives
- poor level suitability
- poor media selection and media mix
- not following the principles and practices of DE
- low production of new titles

The workshops would take as many as five subjects at one sitting and as many as 20 to 30 writers. Writers would develop what they thought was suitable material for the target students. It was assumed that, since they were professional teachers in the secondary schools, they would be experts on course writing. It was believed they would have no problems in selecting content for their units and scripts. Most of the materials did not meet the College's expectations. The editors would then begin to rewrite the materials for coordination, relevance, suitability and to incorporate the aspects of distance teaching in them. Then, the College would conduct other workshops to refine the materials. The refining of the materials was difficult because there was no *blueprint* to refer to. From the performance of the writers, several conclusions were drawn:

1. Inadequate training
2. The method of course development could have been wrong and unrealistic
3. The College could have over estimated the writers' competence, skills and knowledge
4. Poor resources, ie. inadequate titles and other resources available for writers
5. The writers could not give their best because of poor remuneration
6. Poor supervision during development process
7. Inappropriate briefing on what the writers were expected to do
8. Inappropriate writer selection procedures
9. Unrealistic targets given to the writers
10. Poor guidance on the required content of the prescribed curriculum.

The editing process of the materials took long, thus creating a bottleneck in course development. During workshops, the editorial staff was involved in academic, administrative, managerial and educational duties. This made their work in preparing manuscripts for production suffer greatly. The results, therefore, were:

1. Low production
2. The materials produced were of poor quality
3. The editorial process of the materials slowed down
4. The expertise of the tutors and producers were under utilised
5. The College paid huge sums of money for poor work

One workshop would cost as much as MK25,000 (US\$595.24) , and because the work would be incomplete, extra workshops would be mounted to complete and refine the materials. A minimum of five workshops would be run and the cost would come up to MK125,000 (US\$2976.20). One unit was valued at MK490 (US\$11.67) per zero draft. The average production of 225 writers was 10.5 units per writer. Sometimes untrained writers would be recruited to participate in the writing of course materials. Although these writers were selected on the basis of their qualification and knowledge of their subject, the materials they developed would, sometimes, have good content but the aspects of distance teaching would be missing greatly. The work of these writers then seriously affected the editorial process.

The other two methods which the College uses are freelance writing or tutor/producers writing. These two

methods have their own setbacks. The freelance writers take time and can submit the materials as they wish. It is the same when the materials are developed by the internal tutor/producer. These officers have other jobs besides their work as course developers. They, too, take time and the course may not be produced to meet the needs of the students.

Materials developed outside workshops have problems such as lack of coordination and content depth. They also do not have the distance education aspect. When materials come from freelance writers to the tutor/producer, they may not be looked at critically and as a result the manuscripts are pushed over to the editor to do the job. Some of the pitfalls of manuscripts from freelance writers and tutor producers are:

- the materials fall short of content
- the materials are usually written in note form
- the materials are full of lifted texts from books
- The materials lack media coordination
- the materials are not presented according to the structure and format of the College

Course development route

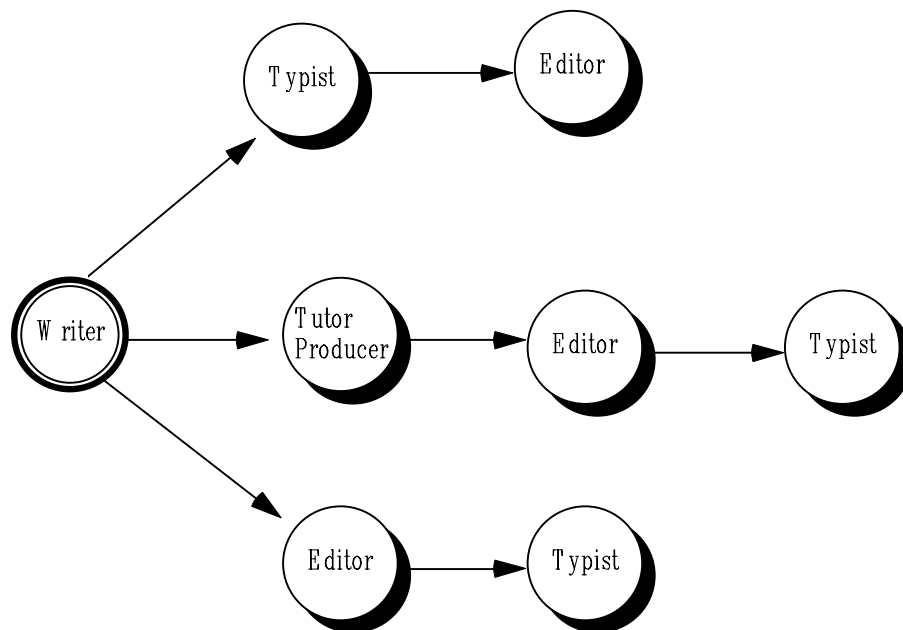
The development of study materials usually takes three routes. Each route has its own problems:

1. The editor is sometimes considered as only a proofreader
2. The role of the tutor/producer is not clear in development process
3. The editor can be considered as an expert of content on the materials

Current practice in course development at MCDE

After reviewing these problems, the College is making an experiment in course development method. The management's plan to facilitate the production of course materials include a basic outline as follows:

1. Agreement on the students' needs
2. Development of the required materials to answer the students' needs
3. Distribution of the materials to the students



Drawing from the above outline of the activities towards satisfying the students needs, the plan of the management for course development is expected to cover the following:

- definition of students' needs through detailed proposals by the tutors/producers of the subjects
- an outline of the content of the materials to be covered
- proposed learning objectives, teaching points and outcomes
- design and organisation of the materials related to the entire course
- the role and responsibilities of various course developers during development
- line of communication and authority levels
- proposals of quality control mechanism
- proposed budget for the development of the materials

The tutors, producers, editors and graphic artist are expected to work together during the initial designing phase and planning period. The designing of the course from a given syllabus requires making decision on:

1. Outline of the content
2. Learning objectives for individual units
3. Teaching points for individual units
4. Content of summaries, exercises and model answers
5. Technical words to form part of vocabulary or glossary
6. Media selection and media mix

When this is completed, subject experts from secondary schools are invited to moderate the designed materials for quality control. Their functions include determining the depth of content covered in the course, the suitability of the objectives, the suitability of the materials for the target students and the relevance of the materials to the curriculum. The final copy of the outlined and designed materials becomes the blueprint for editors, tutors, producers and course writers. It also helps in the pretesting and piloting of the materials.

Only after the blueprint is in place, the writers are invited to develop the materials. During course development process, the writers, tutors, graphic artist and editors work together in:

1. Selecting content
2. Drafting materials
3. Editing content
4. Presenting content
5. Illustrating the course

The work that remains after teamwork is preparation of the materials for print which is mainly editorial work. The editors are then responsible for typesetting, layout and proofreading of the materials. The subject tutors take part in the proofreading exercise. When the materials are completed, they are tested and sometimes piloted. The materials are tested for content accuracy, content depth, language correctness, suitability for the target students, interactiveness and participatory elements (which make student active learners). Then finally, before mass production, the materials are piloted on the target students.

Problems in course delivery

For the past 10 years, MCDE has been dominating in the provision secondary education through DEC's, NSS and home study programme. Its market share has been growing from 35,000 to 150,000 students, while MCDE's competitor, i.e. the government and private conventional secondary schools, has always trailed behind, taking at least one seventh of the market. While the enrolment has been increasing, resources have been decreasing and depleting.

In the past MCDE produced enough printed self-instructional materials for all its students. It also carried out support system such as research, tutor-marking and DEC inspection with fewer difficulties. It supervised and conducted orientation programmes for teachers-supervisors in various subjects. Sets and radio programmes were revised to update information. Currently, most of these services are not done adequately. Now MCDE provides the following services with difficulty:

- Teacher-supervisors orientation in various subjects
- Provision of study materials (at reduced quantities by 90%)
- DEC administration and management
- Development and production of course materials
- Supervision of regional MCDE offices
- Inspection and monitoring of DEC and NSS.

In carrying out its functions in course development and delivery, the College faces problems in:

- (1) *Staffing and training course designers*: Most course tutors who are expected to supervise course development have not received adequate training. They cannot effectively design a course. Their knowledge in distance teaching is not adequate. All tutors have, on top of their jobs, other assignments which keep them busy. The jobs include answering students and teachers' academic queries, marking national examinations, conducting orientation meetings for teachers in newly introduced subjects and sitting on syllabus committees in their various subjects.
- (2) *skills and knowledge for course writers*: All writers of the College are recruited from secondary schools close to MCDE Headquarters. Before they can write for the College, they are trained in the principles and practices of distance education. The training lasts for one to two weeks. This is not adequate considering that writing is hard work and that it needs proper training. The problem aggravates when the writers have to learn the principles and practices of DE as well as writing. The remuneration for the writers is also not attractive. The government approved a fee of MK100 (about US\$ 2.38) per drafted unit of 10 pages.
- (3) *Staffing, training and equipment for the editorial and School Broadcasting Unit*: The editorial has at present one person who is expected to edit instructional materials for all the courses the College offers. The equipment in the unit has aged and offers problems in producing camera ready copies. The editor is expected to edit, design, typeset and proofread instructional material besides other duties. Schools Broadcasting Unit has five people: one principal producer (who also serves as the head of the Tutorial), two producers, one senior producers (deployed as editor for the Tutorial and SBU). Most of the production equipment in the unit is grounded and currently production of radio/audio programmes is very low.
- (4) *Funding for development of course materials*: Development and production of instructional materials have not been going on well because Government funding dropped from MK19 million (US\$452380.98) to MK9 million (US\$214285.71) per annum. This affected the writing, production of study materials and course delivery. The College could not afford to pay writers, production costs and air time to Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. Basically most programmes are suffering because funding is a problem.
- (5) *Quality control mechanism*: There is no proper mechanism that is being followed to control course materials development and production and services offered by the College. The research and evaluation were reliable quality control instruments but in the event of poor funding, it does not function adequately. Research and evaluation facilities were provided by a section in the College which pretested print instructional materials and radio programmes. (This section had been disbanded now.)
- (6) *Information resources for course development*: The College does not have adequate funds to purchase books. Its library contains a lot of old books. Information contained in books is required to develop study materials, however, the College has problems in acquiring good resources.
- (7) *Management: planning, organising, coordination, motivation (commanding) and controlling*: Course management is time consuming and requires good understanding of the curricula on the part of planners. The current syllabuses are from 1982 and some of the topics have been dropped. In the absence of up-to-date syllabuses and curricula it is difficult to develop quality instructional materials.

Decline of education in DEC

During the late 1980s MCDE was funded by ODA and ADA in a three-year plan to revise all its courses and renovate its building. The package included course development equipment and a distribution

vehicle. Regional offices were built under the same plan. Some computers and a distribution vehicle were purchased and training and writers' workshops were mounted. Behind the programme was International Extension College (IEC) of UK. An IEC full time consultant worked at MCDE to monitor and direct the programmes of the plan. The three-year plan came to an end with no single course completely revised.

In the 1990s Government funding began to drop from MK19 million to MK9 million a year. The College's policy on all instructional materials produced for DEC students was to become the property of the DECs. Students would borrow these materials as library resources. While funding was declining, student enrolment began to rise steadily from 35,000 to 150,000 active students. MCDE could no longer satisfy its students' needs.

Soon there was a shortage of the resources and education began to decline. The effects of these were observed when students and teachers would complain about instructional materials. In 1996 and 1997 the results for senior examinations were poor. However, on random sampling, it was observed that:

- teachers could effectively deliver the course
- the quality of the materials was poor in that they were outdated (there had not been revised)
- the DECs had lost their radio receivers and could not follow schools' programmes
- the students were demoralised and discipline in the DECs began to worsen
-

Plans to revitalize course delivery activities

Open and Distance learning materials

The concept of Opening Learning in Malawi is new. As mentioned earlier, the number of conventional secondary schools is small hence Form I places are limited. For example, in 1997 examination results, of 98,819 primary school leaving certificate successful candidates only 8,359 were selected for Form I into conventional secondary schools; leaving 90,460 students. All those not selected were school going-age who had not developed self-discipline to study on their own. To provide secondary education to these students, Open Learning and Distance Education is thought to be a solution.

Currently, MCDE is carrying out a pilot project aimed at revitalising the learning in the DECs using Open Learning and Distance Education principles and practices. The aim of the project is to revitalise DECs by moving towards a more cost-effective and unified quality secondary education. The specific objective of the project is to introduce reforms in:

- (a) DEC management
- (b) Teaching/learning
- (c) Instructional materials

The strategies of the pilot project are:

- (a) Improving management of DECs by setting up and training management teams
- (b) Improving teaching/learning by using:
 - direct instructions
 - libraries as resource-bases
 - Study circles
- (c) Improving instructional materials by providing the DECs with:
 - secondary education textbooks for the direct teaching component
 - teachers' guides
 - students' guides
 - library books
 - assignments

Background information to pilot project

Danida DEC pilot project was proposed in October 1997 by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture's technical advisor (TA). The aim of the project, which has started in 25 DEC, is to identify ways of revitalising the DECs by providing *quality education* in putting the DECs back on the right track, since it was found out that the DECs no longer operated as distance education centres.

The TA's explanation was, Danida had opted to support DECs because, when the Minister had asked for the building of secondary schools in the country, it was discovered that there was a group of students who were under privileged. These were the DEC students. With the advice of two consultants, Mr Tony Read and Mr Williams, the TA put in place an action plan to improve the DECs. It was decided that the pilot project should aim at improving:

1. DEC management
2. Teaching/learning in the DECs
3. Learning materials in DECs

On the basis of the findings from one district, Mwanza, and having studied five booklets, the consultants and the TA compiled a report entitled a *List of Annexes*. The report discussed in detail the following aspects of the activities of the College (not the DECs).

- MCDE authorship and editorial issues
- Production and editorial problems identified in MCDE learning sets
- Annual learning sets output required to meet students' demand
- MCDE instructional materials budget
- MCDE print unit annual capacity
- Specimen annual paper requirement to meet demand
- MCDE unit cost calculations
- MCDE distribution of learning sets
- Availability of instructional materials in DECs and conventional secondary schools

The main criticism on the study materials are in the design and production of materials. However, the report did not specify the basis of this measurement for quality improvement. There is no reference made to either the Malawi curriculum or to the excellence of the materials themselves. The consultancy did not take into account that MCDE had problems and the process of improving the quality of its instructional materials was underway as specified in its 1996 mission statement. The consultants thought the solution was to introduce *Open Learning/Distance Learning* with a library as a resource-base. And on these terms an *action plan* was designed. The TA made a series of meetings with MCDE management. He observed some deficiency in the way MCDE operated in the past. He, therefore, advised MCDE management that the way to survive was to use the proposed methods of solving the problems. The *action plan* contained the following ten articles:

1. DECs are to be seen as full secondary education institutions
2. MOE will take responsibility for management of DECs while MCDE will retain the management of NSS and home students
3. The management of DECs will be under the Principal Secretary for education
4. That the role of MCDE must urgently be revisited so that MCDE can fulfill its role in relation to DECs as the provider of *quality education*
5. That a national Association of DEC Management is established to strengthen collaboration and cooperation between MOE and DEC local management
6. That there will be a moratorium of the opening of all future DECs without prior full approval by MOE
7. DECs are grossly under funded and that this must be addressed by MOE as a matter of urgency
8. That MOE/MCDE should implement a *pilot project* to test revitalisation strategies to bring DECs up to full secondary level competence. The pilot should cover all regions and that all types of DECs will be represented, that is, urban/rural, day/boarding, etc.

9. That all future planning of DECs will be within the context of school mapping for the provision of secondary education
10. That MOE will develop a programme for training of a special cadre of distance education secondary teachers. This should include a refresher course programme for MCDE staff.

MCDE's concerns on the action plan

MCDE expressed its concerns on the pilot project and they were summarised as follows:

1. There is uncertainty to whether MCDE should continue to produce materials in the light of the consultants' report, which highlighted that materials are inappropriate, inaccurate and of poor quality,
2. If production of materials should continue, there must be a thorough evaluation (in greater depth than the consultants') to help improve the materials. This would require more funds
3. The role of MCDE in the educational materials development in the pilot project should be explained more carefully giving clarification on MCDE's input, such as approval of DEC materials, books, supplementary materials, training of teachers and support of monitoring the pilot
4. The role of MCDE in the training of distance teacher supervisors be explained clearly
5. MCDE role and responsibility in evaluating the instructional materials it develops should be explained
6. There should be a clear statement on the operation of *Open Learning*, as OL does not adhere to rigid time limits. Students aiming to sit MSCE using Open Learning resource-base system should be able to pace their own learning strategy
7. A clear statement should be made regarding the role of MCDE regional offices
8. Plans should be made to make MCDE become an autonomous body and be allowed to diversify its course materials to include academic, professional and pre-vocational courses to be offered using three media: print, audio/radio and face-to-face?
9. How MCDE would restructure itself internally relating to production
10. How MCDE would be able to develop *quality* radio/audio and printed materials without expertise and adequate resources, equipment and machines. This would require the retaining of some of the air time on MBC (national radio) for special academic purpose/rapid communication, its involvement in the training of teacher-supervisors in the use of open and distance learning materials, evaluation of the instructional materials before production

The TA had no clear solutions to MCDE's concerns because what he was interested in was the pilot project and a moratorium of opening any future DECs.

Launching of the pilot project

A task force of three MCDE officers was formed and it visited DECs in the three regions with the aim to invite the DECs to take part in the pilot project. Thirty-one DECs were visited and briefed on the pilot project. All DECs submitted their application. But 21 DECs were selected to take part in the pilot project: five DECs in the Northern Region, five DECs in the Central Region, and eleven DECs in the Southern Region. The choice of districts and later the selection of DECs to participate in the pilot project was done by the TA in liaison with MOE/MCDE. Later one DEC was dropped because it could not manage to house the materials to be provided. It was immediately replaced. The criteria for selection were:

- A staff-student ratio of at least 1:50
- At least 15 of the DECs were to come from non-boarding (day students) DECs
- World Bank assisted and donor/agency assisted DECs were to be excluded
- Preference was to be given to at least DECs operating in existing primary schools (with a strong focus on junior secondary level)

The criteria were not strictly observed because the DECs, although they belong to the communities, were either built with aid from donor community or agencies.

Sensitising stakeholders and publishers

A meeting was held to sensitise the communities on the pilot project and explain to publishers their role in it. Publishers were asked to submit samples of their books from which books would be selected for libraries and students' textbooks in the DECs. The meeting involved DEOs, teachers-in-charge, some MCDE staff (including two VSOs at MCDE), MIE, Malawi Institute of Education, Chancellor College (one of the colleges of the University of Malawi) and publishers from Macmillan, Jhango, Oxford University Press, Longman, Dzuka and University of Malawi.

At this meeting MCDE officers, assisted by Danida's consultant, selected appropriate books in the following subjects for both junior and senior secondary students: *Agriculture, Bible Knowledge, Biology, Chichewa, Commerce, English, History, Geography, Mathematics and Physical Science* (only for Junior Secondary). A list of the books was made and publishers were asked to sign contracts for the delivery of the books. The books were to be delivered from two points: Malawi for those books that were printed in Malawi or those that could be supplied by the local publisher like Dzuka and from UK all books that could be consolidated in UK. This was done and books were delivered directly to the pilot project DECs by the publishers and Union Transport for those that were consolidated in UK.

After the selection of DECs to participate in the pilot project, DEOs, chairpersons of the Management Committees and teachers-in-charge of 21 DECs were invited for orientation and appreciation on the management of Open Learning DECs for two days. The orientation and appreciation meetings took place in the three regions. The meetings were rerun by the TA, the Principal of MCDE and one MCDE officer. Later 4 DECs were included from the southern region and northern region. This brought the total number of pilot project DECs to 25.

Establishment of pilot project DEC libraries

The pilot project DECs were funded with MK20,000 to convert classrooms into libraries. Later DEC librarians were trained on how to set up and run a library as a resource base in the Open Learning DECs. Training meetings took place in five venues.

The pilot was launched in the three regions with the attendance of DEOs, education divisional managers, teachers-in-charge, DEC chairpersons and students. The aim of the meetings was to explain the revitalisation process: *The argument for the revitalisation process was: DECs are institutions where MCDE students ought to receive assistance in their course of study. Currently, DECs face problems in fulfilling their role: DECs are not following the principles and practices of distance education in course delivery. Instead conventional teaching is being used at the expense of quality learning.*

Face-to-face teaching is being carried out:

- by teachers not properly qualified to teach a secondary school curriculum
- without adequate teaching/learning material and facilities

Management of DECs is not efficient:

- there is no support for management committees to carry out their duties efficiently
- there is no control/support for boarding facilities
- there is no financial control

The meeting explained the concept of *Open Learning* with a library as a resource-base and how learning would be improved in the DECs. It was stressed that the pilot project would insist that:

- learning should be learner-centred and flexible
- learners be active and participate in their learning
- learners do their course in logical steps and systematic way
- learners build confidence and competence in the knowledge and skills they obtain
- learners be continually tested in what they learn for feedback and revision

- learners be given adequate and professional help where needed in order to consolidate the knowledge and skills they learn

On management the meetings explained that MOE would manage the selected 21 DEC's (and now 25 DEC's) and MCDE would be responsible for the education component by developing teaching and learning materials in the form of guides. The proposed structure of the Open and Distance Learning was given and was to be on the principle of 30%, 30%, 30% and 10%. That is on teaching, assignments, library work and student/teacher consultation respectively.

Project management

The TA stressed that the management of the project belongs to MCDE. Danida's involvement was limited to providing advice on how to carry it out. But there is very little consultation on other activities related to the project. The TA's organisation and control of the project needs to be thoroughly reviewed to iron out delays and differences that seem to hang around the operations of the project.

The project does not have office equipment and computers. Most activities of the pilot cannot be carried out because there is no vehicle allocated to the pilot. MCDE vehicles are in dilapidated state to be used for project planned activities.

Observations on the accessibility of open and distance learning

MCDE is attracted to Brooke's ideas that Open Learning:

- engages the learner in activity, not in passive listening and viewing
- moves along in logical steps, building confidence and competence in the learner
- continually tests the users' understanding, giving extra help where needed and ensuring that new knowledge, attitudes and skills are consolidated

MCDE believes that in course development there is need to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is required to be taught?
- (2) What do learners need for examinations?
- (3) How should the materials be presented to the learner (media)?
- (4) How are learners expected to gain knowledge and skills?

MCDE accepts that learning implies that the learner acquires facts, information and skills using various educational technologies. DEC students can learn from textbooks but most find it difficult. They need a teacher to help them understand. OL and DL use programmed learning (PL) which presents programmed text (PT) to learners. PT offers small pieces of information which require the learner to respond to. In developing Open and Distance Learning materials MCDE understands that there is need to make a distinction on:

- (a) *Distance learning* courses which are suitable for adults who are unable for one reason or another to attend local conventional schools
- (b) *Resource-based* learning which is built around course materials, assignments and other resources that enable learners to study in their own time without direct supervision
- (c) *Open and flexible* learning which allows learners to access learning resources in order to improve their knowledge, skills and qualifications

The flexible approach where the materials can be used in various ways include:

1. As part of *resource - based learning*, the students can study in study centres or at home, completing the practical assignments either at home or at a study centre
2. Open and Flexible learning allows students to look at materials at their convenience and in their own time
3. Flexible approach enables students to choose units and modules to suit his/her needs

MCDE and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture need to organise resources for the DECs. These resources will include:

- (a) *Text (print)*, course books, packs or other printed materials with essential information and self-assessment questions
- (b) *Books*, modules can incorporate published books with tasks and assignments based on the books.
- (c) *Assignments*, based on the text require written/or practical answers
- (d) *Aids*, posters, films, videos, slides, computer programmes, audio cassettes, or other relevant materials.
- (f) *Tutorials*, self-learning and correspondence packs with a tutor

What attracts MCDE, Open Learning attempts to remove barriers to learning and puts emphasis on the learner—OL is learner-centred. The essential idea on OL is that it opens up new opportunities some of which are:

- (i) Flexible approach in traditional schemes to entry and attendance
- (ii) Allowing learners to study what they like, when and where they like, when and where they find it most convenient
- (iii) Providing specially prepared self-instructional materials
- (iv) Providing special tutorial help
- (v) Allowing access to a mix of traditional and open learning arrangements

There is no restriction on the arrangements for the provision of *Open Learning*. It can take place in a centre, or home and can be combined with access to a centre. It can also be provided at a distance from the providing centre. MCDE has, therefore, a task in deciding how best it can use Open and Distance Education to answer the national needs in education, especially when it will have to deal with twice as much the current enrolment in the years after the year 2002. OL can be provided by any type of centre. These can be schools, community-based education centres and colleges. Malawi has all these. All it needs is to see how these facilities can be fully utilised to provide education.

Market for Open Learning

The aim of Open Learning must suit the needs of the learners or nation. The principles of marketing, that is, production, pricing, promotion and distribution, must be applied. This implies that MCDE:

- identifies and assesses the needs of students and national education aims
- determines the aspects of guidance
- considers cost effectiveness
- considers quality assurance and improvement

To remove barriers to learning, there is need to provide complete information to centres on the needs of learners. In establishing a centre, existing sources of information should be explored. Learners should be informed of the availability of the materials. Promotional material should be created and constantly updated. These should be appropriate, helpful and readily available for the target group if the Open and Distance Learning is to be successful and cost-effective in Malawi.

Staffing the centres should be ensured. The personnel should be suitably qualified to develop and implement delivery strategies. Staff development programmes should be introduced to ensure that all staff understands the delivery system and also provide knowledge and skills. Efforts should be made to redirect practitioners' attitudes so that they can play their part effectively.

Achievements and recommendations

Initially the pilot was to be restricted to 21 DECs but toady the pilot has 25 DECs. Plans were to thoroughly train DEC librarians. This was partially done. However, there was a proposal to give a comprehensive training to the teachers on how the DEC libraries would help in the learning process using Open Learning system. This has not been achieved.

There were plans to train the DEC management committees on how to run the DECs. This has not been done. Likewise, the training of the teachers and study circle leaders in the use of Open Learning system which was planned has not been done.

The programme was initially meant to start in the second term of the 1998 academic year. This did not take place instead it was pushed to the third term. This also failed. Time was spent sorting out the logistics of the project and how the monitoring of the pilot project DEC libraries would be done.

1. The project has some good ideas that can help improve education in DECs and in the whole country using Open Learning which to some degree can solve the problem of overcrowding in DECs and make education accessible to the masses. However, the problems MCDE has encountered already with the school going-age in DECs should be considered seriously in the implementation of this programme.
2. Inputs from the TA and the implementers should be consolidated to the best interest of the system.
3. For consistency and continuity of the project the same officers should be deployed to maintain the smooth flow of operation
4. The project does not have its own equipment and transport. And because of the restrained resources at MCDE some project activities and even those of MCDE have suffered
5. There is need to ensure that there is one focal point instead of several to avoid animosities among implementers
6. The activities in the non-pilot DECs should not necessarily be dictated by the conditions applicable to the pilot DECs until the results of the pilot project are out.
7. There is need to review the project objectives and condition for extension or overall implementation. The objective of the project may need to be reformulated in some parts to reflect exactly what has to be achieved and when it has to be achieved.

It is important to spell out the roles of the stakeholders and the roles of the TA, MOE and MCDE. Channels of communication should be established so that it is clearly stated who does what.

Final observation on MCDE's donor-funded projects

There are several problems with donor inputs at MCDE. The three-year plan to revise all courses was done without proper needs assessment. The courses were to be revised with little understanding of the nature of the College student. The consultants did not clearly define terms of reference for *quality improvement*. The donor simply gave inputs with very little social action. MCDE depended on the donor input and when the three-year plan came to an end, the resources stopped and MCDE waited for other donors. The Governments' funding also was inadequate because of the number of students which was growing and the funding was being reduced. MCDE can only survive as long as a donor supports it.

The current pilot project promises to provide 40 million Kroner (MK120,000). The approach and process are the same as that of experienced before: the donor is giving books and funding for improving the DEC library rooms. There is very little social action. MCDE is not given the chance to improve its publishing skills and to plan to fend for itself after the donor has completed the proposed term for funding. All learning materials for the DECs will have to be bought from abroad and very few from Malawi-based publishers.

The knowledge used for quality improvement of DECs is like technical knowledge and can only be supplied by consultants from abroad. The local personnel is used to provide a workforce only. It is observed that after the 15-year programme, MCDE will not stand on its own because it will have no material and human resources for producing education materials and sustaining its programmes.

Selected reading

Bosmorth, David P. (1991), *Open Learning*, Cassell

Catalogue, Distance and Resource-Based Learning Course Materials 1996/97, West Herts College

Davies, Ivor K., (1976) *Objectives in Curriculum Design*, McGrawHill

Murphy, Shaun (Ed) (1990), *A Manager's Guide to Audio - Visual Production* Kegan Page
National Guidelines on Open Learning, (1989), SCOL