Geophysical Research Abstracts
Vol. 18, EGU2016-12539, 2016
EGU General Assembly 2016

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THE TEACHING OF GEO SCIENCE IN MALAWI SECONDARY SCHOOLS: The case of the Solar System and beyond
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Malawi secondary school curriculum has been offering Geo sciences Education since the dawn of independence from the British rule in 1964. Qualified primary and secondary school teachers are responsible for the teaching of Geo sciences. The assumption is that trained teachers are more likely to produce successful students thus making geoscience a successful subject. To make the subject more relevant and captivating to stakeholders, the government revised Geo science curriculum and incorporated other topics. Among additional topic was the solar system that was covered in great detail in secondary school. The solar system is a Geo science concept taught in Geography curriculum from primary school for 8 years and in secondary school for 4 years. Despite the solar system being one of the traditional topics in Malawi school curriculum and Government's effort to revise the curriculum in the interest of learners and improving the pass rate, number of students conversant with the topic has been failing sharply over the years. The disparity between the input in terms of effort to improve familiarity with solar system among learners and the outcomes is of great concern and worth hard investigation to inform education policy and curriculum revision decisions.
Based on empirical data collected through qualitative research design, the paper establishes that regardless of imploring such interventions, there are still indicators that students continue to fail in solar system related subjects. Malawi National Examination report (2015) reveals that Geography at Malawi School Certificate Examinations pass rate has been going down ranging from 69.49 to 60.78 per cent from 2009 to 2014. The report advances that lack of instruction materials across the schools have contributed to deteriorating knowledge in solar system education. For instance, the school may have no simple models such as globes that clarify the shape of the earth better. As such, the teacher may improvise by getting an orange year in and year out. Using such single improvisation strategy has resulted into boring and monotonous lessons hence high failure in the subject. Furthermore, the study reveals that other factors contributing to poor pass rate include use of single teaching and learning skills hence making the topic less popular among the learners. The paper concludes that education stakeholders need to take extra steps on purchasing of teaching and learning instructions to improve teaching and learning of the solar system to produce successful Malawian astronomers. The responsibility of purchasing teaching instructions should not be left to government alone. Lastly, teaching and learning of the solar system should be innovative and meaningful to the environment outside the classroom where learners can see pieces of empirical evidence.
Key Words: Malawi, Geography, Malawi National Examinations Board, Solar System
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