

## Education of Incarcerated Young People in Malawi: Strategic Plan versus Reality

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### Abstract

Education must be accessible to all citizens, including those incarcerated in penitentiaries, to contribute to the socio-economic development of the countries. In Malawi, to enhance incarcerated people's access to quality education in correctional facilities, the Malawi Prisons Service (MPS) included education as a strategic objective in its five-year strategic plan covering the period between 2016 and 2021. This article analysed and compared this strategic education objective against reality to ascertain its implementation and relevance during the implementation period. Guided by Bunning's model of strategic planning, the study employed a qualitative content analysis research method using the 'hybrid approach'. The study mainly used data from the semi-structured interviews involving purposively selected 25 educators and officials from five young offenders' rehabilitation centres in Malawi. Findings revealed a mismatch between the contents of the strategic education objective and the actual reality. The study identified characteristics of Bunning's ritual approach since it was revealed that the strategic plan was developed to please the government and development partners. From the education objective viewpoint, the strategic plan was hardly used during the five years since the educational activities remained the same (even worse) after the implementation period. The young offenders' facilities were still stuck in the punitive philosophy, as evidenced by limited resources in the education section and the management's priority on coerced farming instead of education. It was recommended that the correctional administrations needed to prioritise the provision of quality education for school-aged offenders in correctional policies.

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## **Introduction**

Education is an indisputable device that provides unlimited opportunities to people. In Malawi, the country's constitution does not discriminate against the right to education based on anything, even incarceration, since, according to section 25(1), "all persons are entitled to education" (Government of Malaŵi, 2018, p. 16). Moreover, section 163 of the same constitution mandates the Malawi Prisons Service (MPS) to not only house and detain prison inmates but also engage them in programmes, including education that will rehabilitate them. Furthermore, Malawi as a nation is obliged to provide education to incarcerated people because the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises education as one of the fundamental human rights that prisoners should also enjoy (UNESCO, 2021). According to UNESCO (2021), prisoners have the right to access quality education and lifelong learning during incarceration and after release. To fully engage in the education of offenders as a vital component of the constitutionally mandated rehabilitation function, the MPS included education activities in its strategic plan covering the period between 2016 and 2021 (MPS, 2016). In this five-year strategic plan, the department identified and included six goals. Education objective was within the third goal, which was "to expand and improve offender reformation programmes". The education objective committed the MPS to increase offenders' access to education by, among many things, enrolling all incarcerated school-aged young people into primary and secondary education within correctional facilities (MPS, 2016, pp. 25-33). In 2022, the MPS had 30 facilities all over the country, of which five were young offenders centres (Kajawo & Johnson, 2023). The plan was, therefore, to open and resource schools at all correctional facilities in Malawi. Surprisingly, studies report that strategic planning does not usually translate into reality (Kayuni, 2017; Klimenko & Kalgin, 2018; Salum et al., 2017). There are usually discrepancies between the planned activities and the reality (Bunning, 1992, Kayuni, 2017).

This study was, therefore, aimed at comparing and analysing the education strategic objective of the MPS 2016-2021 Strategic Plan against the reality on the ground, a year after the expiry of the implementation period. The study attempts to assess the extent to which the strategic education objective had been fulfilled within the five years of the strategic plan's implementation period to ascertain its relevance. It also explores factors that could have hindered the implementation of this strategic education objective to identify Bunning (1992)'s strategic planning approach closely aligned to the MPS strategic planning process.

### **Education in Young Offenders' Centres**

The existing literature generally makes greater attempts to justify rehabilitation, including education as a successful endeavour on prisoners' desistance, reduction to re-offending and post-incarceration schooling (e.g. Carter, 2019; Duwe & Clark, 2017; Hawley et al., 2013; Jäggi & Kliewer, 2020). Education access is considered mandatory and obligatory by law for young offenders

compared to their adult counterparts (Hawley et al., 2013; Jäggi & Kliewer, 2020). The consensus is that school-aged incarcerated young people "must receive schooling meeting the minimal standards of mandatory public education" (Jäggi & Kliewer, 2020, p. 2). This is especially because education is transformative since it equips individuals with the critical skills essential for developing their societies (Adkins, 2016). The need for education is also powerfully stipulated in international laws such as the UN standard minimum rules for the treatment of offenders (the Mandela Rules) which obliges the prison administrations to provide educational opportunities to young offenders (United Nations, 2015). The justification is that young offenders are among the thousands of prisoners worldwide that are expected to be released each year (Bachman & Schutt, 2018; Davis et al., 2014); thus they should not find it difficult to reintegrate, such as continue schooling in their communities after their release.

In agreement with international law, studies have shown that education is provided in correctional facilities worldwide. For instance, in the USA, Europe and the even United Arab Emirates, schooling for school-aged incarcerated young offenders is obligatory (Davis et al., 2014; Grant, 2017; Hawley et al., 2013; Jäggi & Kliewer, 2020). A study by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (2015) found that young offenders were provided with formal education in many ASEAN member states such as Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Studies in many African countries have also reported that young offenders are provided with formal education in many penitentiaries (e.g. Ajah & Ugwuoke, 2018; Fambasayi & Moyo, 2020; Johnson & Quan-Baffour, 2022; Makuwerere, 2020; Msoroka et al., 2018). Johnson (2022) report that education programmes are offered in many penitentiary facilities in African countries such as South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Namibia, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda. In South Africa, education is considered a constitutional right and a "foundation stone for rehabilitation" for incarcerated people (Johnson, 2022, p. 1).

In Malawi, education in penitentiaries was non-existence until the late 1990s, when it was introduced after the new constitutional order (Kajawo, 2023; Kajawo & Nyirongo, 2022; Mwakilama, 2010). To enhance the quality of correctional services, the Malawi Prisons Service included educational objectives in its first strategic plan, which was implemented from 2016 to 2021 (Kajawo, 2019; Kajawo & Nyirongo, 2022; Kajawo & Johnson, 2023). However, studies on correctional education indicate that the international laws granting similar educational rights enjoyed by the communities outside prisons to offenders do not always translate to access or provision of quality education in penitentiary facilities (Gadama et al., 2020; Hawley et al., 2013). Gadama et al. (2020) argue that even though international standards are vital, there is usually a risk of non-compliance and being ignored by duty-bearers because "they are soft laws" (p. 14). In many instances, the effort of aligning or customising the international obligation end in policy formulation or strategic planning processes without any corresponding actual implementation. For instance, studies have reported that

education was not accessible to some young offenders in some African countries, such as Tanzania, despite well-formulated policies depicting the same (Msoroka et al., 2018; Msoroka, 2019). Msoroka et al. (2018) observe that despite the availability of education policies and plans, many penitentiaries still do not provide educational services to offenders, including the young ones and "there is no room for anyone to question its implementation" (p. 48). This implies that the evaluation of offenders' educational policies and plans against their implementations is pivotal.

### **Strategic planning *vis-à-vis* implementation reality**

Strategic planning is becoming a prominent process on public organisations' agenda because of the recent countries' rush in public management reforms, even though the field is rarely researched (Cheung & Yu, 2020; Kayuni, 2017). It is reported that during the early years of the emergence of strategic planning worldwide in the 1950s, the private sector fully embraced it compared to the public sector organisations that did not immediately see its relevance (Kayuni, 2017; Nartisa et al., 2012). However, the global public management reforms triggered the need for strategic planning in the public sector worldwide.

In Malawi, strategic planning gained prominence in the public sector in the 2000s when the government started implementing comprehensive public sector reforms (Kayuni, 2017). Before these reforms, public institutions were not obliged to engage in strategic planning, thus less than 5% of all government institutions had strategic plans (Kayuni, 2017). It was the implementation of comprehensive public sector reforms that necessitated the availability of institutional strategic plans (Kayuni, 2017). This triggered the government to publicly communicate a directive to all public sector bodies to engage and develop strategic plans (Kayuni, 2017). Despite this strong directive, not all public sector institutions immediately developed their strategic plans (Kayuni, 2017; Sikwese, 2013). Kayuni (2017) observes that many public sector organisations still operated without strategic plans 15 years after the directive. Among those organisations was the MPS (Sikwese, 2013).

In the assessment report on public sector reforms in Malawi by Sikwese (2013), it was strongly recommended that public institutions including the MPS needed to develop strategic plans. The MPS finally developed and launched its first strategic plan in 2016 (Kajawo & Nyirongo, 2022; Kajawo & Johnson, 2023; MPS, 2016). This strategic plan was aligned with the Democratic Governance Sector Strategy and the then Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II to ensure that correctional services were in line with the national development agenda (MPS, 2016). This five-year strategic plan envisioned the MPS as moving from 'prison service', which had a punitive connotation, to 'correctional service', which was to focus on offender rehabilitation (Jäggi & Kliwer, 2020; Kajawo & Johnson, 2023; Makuwerere, 2020; MPS, 2016, p. 19). The 'correctional' aspect was strongly embedded and inscribed in the new organisational strategic mission that committed the MPS to provide effective rehabilitation and community reintegration services to offenders.

In the strategic plan, the department identified and included six goals to guide the service in the achievement of its set mission and vision. Education was inscribed in the third goal “to expand and improve offender reformation programmes” (MPS, 2016, p. 25). It was, therefore, exclusively covered in the first objective that committed the MPS to increase offenders’ access to education by, among many things, enrolling all incarcerated young people into primary and secondary education offered within correctional facilities (MPS, 2016). To achieve this objective, several activities were put in place such as extending education to all correctional facilities, especially those incarcerating young people which are called ‘young offenders’ rehabilitation centres’ (YORCs). This was against the background that only 17 out of 30 prison facilities provided offenders’ education programmes (Kajawo, 2019; Kajawo & Nyirongo, 2022; Kajawo & Johnson, 2023). The idea was to construct at least four classroom blocks, a library and a laboratory at each of the 30 correctional facilities over five years, and resource the centres with adequate teachers, teaching and learning equipment and materials to provide quality education equivalent to the one provided in the communities outside prisons as recommended by a number of previous studies (e.g. Gama et al., 2020; Kajawo, 2019; Kajawo & Nyirongo, 2022). Due to this huge commitment, this education strategic objective was allocated a lion’s share in the implementation plan. Out of the 34.5 Billion Malawi Kwacha (47 Million US Dollars) estimated for the five-year activities of this strategic plan; 47% was allocated to the strategic education objective (Kajawo, 2019; MPS, 2016).

However, the study done by Kajawo (2019) which analysed the budget lines or financial allocations of the 17 facilities in the first two years of the implementation of this strategic plan found that the education strategic objective had not yet started being implemented as intended in the strategic plan. Moreover, many studies report that policies and strategic plans do not always translate into reality during the implementation period (Gadama et al., 2020; Kayuni, 2017). In his study involving participants from selected departments under the Office of the President and Cabinet and Ministry of Finance who have been engaged in the strategic planning process since the year 2000, Kayuni (2017) concluded that the strategic planning process lacked the influence and effective leadership, key stakeholder involvement and adequate resources to effectively enhance reforms in the Malawi public sector. It was, therefore, both academically yielding and significant to analyse the implementation of the strategic planning process in a public organisation that was initiating the process for the first time as an extension of Kayuni (2017)’s study.

### **Bunning's model of underlying approaches to strategic planning**

This article applies the Bunning model of underlying approaches to strategic planning in the public sector in analysing the implementation of the education objective in the MPS strategic plan. Bunning's model postulates that the most serious issues related to formulating an effective strategic plan usually stem from their underlying approaches (Bunning, 1992; Favoreu et al., 2015; Johnsen,

2015; Johanson, 2019; Kayuni, 2017; Klimenko & Kalgin, 2018). Bunning, therefore, identified three different approaches in public organisations' strategic planning. The first is the 'ritual approach', which mainly aims at getting funding or complying with government requirements. The second one is the 'technical decision-making approach' which aims to resolve "what should be done" but leaves out key external stakeholders who are likely to disrupt the plan later (Bunning, 1992, p.56). The third approach is the 'consensus-seeking process' in which a compromise is reached among the key stakeholders to make the plan not objectionable at the expense of addressing actual societal problems (Bunning, 1992; Kayuni, 2017). Nevertheless, Bunning recommended 'a learning approach' as the ideal strategic planning underlying approach since the whole strategic planning process can be seen as creating learning opportunities for the stakeholders to interact synergistically for their concurrent understanding of the organisation (Bunning, 1992).

The analysis of the strategic education objective in this study is directly related to the 'ritual approach'. Many scholars concur that the strategic planning process in the public sector in many countries is often an activity merely meant to please some people, such as the central government and development partners (Al-Mawdieh, 2020; Johanson, 2019; Kayuni, 2017). Johanson (2019) argues that this is the worst planning approach since strategic planning is reduced to a ritual, a tool developed to meet government or funding bodies' demands or conform to the requirements. Strategic planning becomes a mere show of organisational evolution and maturity (Al-Mawdieh, 2020). The strategic planning effort ends at producing a 'strategic plan' document without its corresponding implementation. Therefore, completing the strategic plan document would mark the completion of the strategic planning process since employees' attention is drawn back to the organisation's traditional functions, which might not even be included in the plan. The result is usually the strategic document gathering dust on the shelf (Bunning, 1992; Johanson, 2019; Kayuni, 2017). Coincidentally, some activities might be implemented because they are the traditional activities which were going to be carried out anyway even without the presence of the strategic plan.

### **Methodology and Methods**

This paper is based on qualitative research data from a study ethically approved by the MPS authorities and the University of South Africa (UNISA) College of Education Ethics Review Committee conducted at five young offenders' centres in Malawi. The study employed qualitative content analysis research method using the 'hybrid approach' (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018, p. 258) to analyse the educators' perceptions on the education strategic objective in the MPS 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. Schreier (2014) defines qualitative content analysis as a descriptive and interpretative method used to systematically describe the meaning of data by assigning sequential parts of the data to the categories of a coding frame. The choice of this approach was made to utilise the "systematic

set of procedures" available in this approach "for the rigorous analysis, examination" and verification of the targeted strategic plan contents against reality (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 674).

The study sought to answer two questions: To what extent was the strategic education objective fulfilled within the five years of the MPS strategic planning process? What were the factors hindering the successful implementation of the education strategic objective? In responding to these questions, this study collected data through semi-structured interviews from the purposely selected 20 educators at four young offenders' facilities with schools and five officials from one facility without an education programme. The educators were involved because they are among the active participants or consumers in the education system (Demirpolat, 2021). Their involvement "can be highly important in understanding the educational process and conducting more consistent policy analyses in education" (Demirpolat, 2021, p. 361). The interviews, therefore, assisted in gathering rich and useful information from these 25 respondents' lived experiences, knowledge and views regarding the education of young offenders against the strategic plan content (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Complimentary data was generated from the researcher's observations conducted by the first author.

Using a hybrid qualitative content analysis approach, the researcher combined deductive and inductive analytical systems in data analysis (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018). Additionally, the analysis was guided by the stages and tenets outlined by Cohen et al. (2018). The researchers began by "reading between the lines" of the transcripts and the targeted strategic plan document to get familiar with the texts to explore both manifest and underlying meanings from the educators' and officials' interview transcripts and the researcher's field notes (Swann, 2021, p. 26). The strategic plan content was analysed and compared to the educators' perceptions, eventually triangulated with the researcher's observations to maximise trustworthiness. Codes and themes were identified in the MS text editor, which followed the running of a macro (*ExtractCommentsToNewDoc*) to extract the coded data from the transcripts, which enabled the organisation of themes and sub-themes. The hybrid approach of qualitative content analysis assisted in organising the bulky data from 25 educators' and officials' interview transcripts into the already existing themes established from the literature and even creating emerging ones from the data set (Neuendorf, 2017). It also assisted in analysing the strategic planning process using Bunning's model.

### **Findings**

The findings are thematically presented based on the respondents' responses to the research questions. Two themes were identified: there was a mismatch between the strategy's educational plans and the reality, and there were several factors that contributed to the mismatch. The findings are presented under these two separate thematic headings.

The mismatch between the strategy's educational plans and the reality

This study found a mismatch between the educational activities included in the MPS strategic plan and the output (the reality) in the five young offenders' centres. The following subheadings present the analysis of the implementation of the education objective based on the included activities.

(a) Expansion of education availability and access to all facilities in Malawi

In the MPS 2016-2021 strategic plan, the first four activities were about expanding inmates' access to education at 30 facilities, especially at five centres incarcerating young offenders. The plan was to enrol all young offenders into basic education, increase enrollment of inmates at the remaining adult facilities, and extend the right and access to education to female inmates. In this study, the observations showed that the MPS did not put any new effort into expanding educational access to all 30 prison facilities in the country. According to the educators, there were still 17 facilities out of 30 that were offering education programmes to inmates. Out of the 17 facilities, four were young offenders' centres, implying that one young offenders' centre (Facility 5) did not have any education programme. According to the officials at Facility 5, the facility was a farm;

*Here we don't offer education because this is a farm. Inmates are always working on the farm. Even if they are schooling besides farming, it would not be effective because they would be struggling to keep up with school since they would always be tired in the maize fields (F5/PO/25).*

The Facility 5 officials explained that the centre used to offer educational programmes in the past (until 2019). However, they had to close the school to concentrate on farming "...we have 25 hectares of land for farming. We do all our agricultural activities manually using these inmates as labour. When they were engaged in school, the farming activities were suffering. We just closed the school." Another official agreed that education would have hindered the facility's farming goals:

*Here we don't offer education because this is a farm. If we had sustained school here, farming would have suffered. We cannot produce anything if we have a school here. This is because ...almost all inmates would opt for school; hence there might not be anyone to go and work on the farm, since farming is painful, and is even more painful here since we have huge land requiring our attention, of which the source of labour is these inmates. This is why the school had to be closed...We realised that it affected our farming (F5/PO/24).*

Nevertheless, all five officials at this facility acknowledged that there was still a huge demand for education by the incarcerated young people. According to one official, "Many of them want education and the majority also wants to acquire technical skills such as carpentry, plumbing and



*brick-laying even though they are not accessible here*". Instead, all young offenders at this centre were forced to work in the prison farm field.

Moreover, the educators at the remaining four facilities where education was accessible also indicated that many young offenders were still not enrolled in correctional education even though it was accessible. According to educators at two of the four facilities (facilities 1 and 2), the main hindrance was also the compulsory farming activities:

*Many are not in school because they feel like they don't have time for school. Some would make an effort to register but fail to attend because there is no time for education here since they are engaged in farming. When they come back, they are tired to attend classes (F2/EDU/09).*

Even at the two facilities which reported that there were no farming activities, it was noted that the majority of inmates were still not enrolled in education programmes. Overall, the researcher's field notes from the facilities' records showed that only 24% of the inmate population at the five young offenders' facilities (N=764) were schooling. This finding just shows that the majority of young offenders (76%) were still not in school in a population with a mean age of 19.8 years and mode age of 18 years (range= 16-26) that visibly needed education for their future (Jäggi & Kliewer, 2020; Kajawo, 2022; Kajawo & Johnson, 2023). This was a population similar to the one presented by Kızıldaş (2023) of disadvantaged bilingual students as representing sad portraits of crime and academic failure in rural areas of Turkey. In this study, the educators cited the negativity of the environment as discouraging young people from enrolling.

*For somebody to study, he needs a conducive environment. Free from noise, and access to nutritious food... but here they receive food during class hours. Hence some students refuse to attend classes to avoid being missed out on food. They even fail to concentrate on their studies because of noise (F3/EDU/13).*

This result shows that the plan to expand education programmes' availability and access to all inmates in the MPS was not fulfilled during the five years of this strategic planning

(b) Ensure the adequacy of qualified educators

The fifth activity in the strategic plan was to reduce the inadequacy of qualified teachers in prison schools by making arrangements with the Ministry of Education to provide teachers for prison schools and also deploy qualified prison officers as teachers. According to the educators, MPS was far behind in achieving this objective since the four facilities still had shortages of educators. It was noted that the facilities had five to 12 teachers for all 12 classes, respectively. Worse still, the majority of

these already inadequate educators were not qualified to teach in those grades because primary teachers were teaching secondary school classes:

*Teachers teaching in secondary schools here are primary school-qualified teachers, not secondary school teachers. This means there is a need to upgrade them to properly teach at the secondary school levels (F1/EDU/03).*

Facilities two and four were even using unqualified inmates to work as educators. According to a 24-year-old volunteer teacher at Facility Two, the involvement of unqualified inmates as teachers was counter-productive;

*Involving inmates like me to teach here is not productive...I am not that educated to teach others ...students are obviously deprived of the expertise and experiences that a qualified teacher could have provided them. This is because trained teachers know teaching methodologies apart from subject content. But people like me only teach out experience and because I learned those things from my own education (F2/EDU/06).*

According to this volunteer teacher, the inadequacy of teaching staff partly contributed to the unavailability of secondary school classes at facility two since only primary education was accessible.

*The non-availability of secondary school classes sometimes could be because of the inadequacy of teachers here. Even if they open secondary school classes, the chances are that there might not be teachers to teach. Imagine that even amongst us, the inmate teachers...many teachers do not have qualifications ...even MSCE, but they are teaching just because they reached secondary school level (F2/EDU/06).*

This young man and others recommended deploying qualified teachers to improve the education of the incarcerated young people in Malawi.

*They should bring qualified teachers here. They need to deploy those teachers who were trained in education colleges to teach these inmates or even officers who are qualified teachers (F2/EDU/06).*

(c) Construction of classroom blocks, laboratory and library rooms at each facility

The strategic plan also included the construction of at least four classroom blocks, one laboratory and one library at each of the 30 prison schools within five years. Educators in this study observed that this activity was also not accomplished because no single additional classroom block, laboratory or library room were built at their respective five young offenders' facilities within the five years. Three facilities in this study had only four classrooms accommodating 12 classes.

*We only have four classrooms, but we are talking about having standard one up to form four. To accommodate them, we combine classes, for example, forms 1 and 2 as one class and forms 3 and 4 as another, hence compromising quality (F1/EDU/04).*

*In the classroom, most of the classrooms do not have desks. So they sit on the floor even secondary school students. And even the toilets at this school section are not that good. So some inmates just come here to just breathe fresh air but are not motivated to put their concentration on their education (F3/EDU/11).*

Worst still, facility two did not have any proper school structures. Students were still learning in tents since the opening of the school at the facility in 2013.

The findings presented in this section show that almost all planned activities included in the MPS strategic plan were hardly fulfilled or implemented. These findings concur with studies in many African countries which found that well-planned rehabilitation activities usually end at the planning level or in policy papers (Ismaila, 2020; Msoroka et al., 2018; Msoroka, 2019). In the Bunning model, these findings align with the ritual approach (Bunning, 1992; Kayuni, 2017). Relating the Bunning model to the education objective alone, the strategic planning process ended when the strategic plan document was produced (Al-Mawdieh, 2020; Johanson, 2019; Kayuni, 2017). Eventually, the copies were put on shelves, thus never used to guide annual budgeting and educational decision-making.

### **Factors Contributing to the Mismatch**

This theme focused on exploring factors contributing to the mismatch between the strategically planned activities and the reality after the expiry of the implementation period. From the analysis of educators' perceptions, five sub-themes emerged as factors contributing to the mismatch.

(a) Lack of educators' knowledge of the strategic plan and its contents.

Employees as a key stakeholder group need to have the knowledge and be involved in the whole strategic planning process to enhance their commitment (Alfayez, 2020; Salum et al., 2017). However, this study found that 88% of educators and officials (n=25) were ignorant of the existence of the strategic plan: *"This is even my first time to hear about this"*, responded one educator. Another educator concurred with his colleague, *"No. I don't know about that. I don't think we use any strategic plan."* The ignorance of the strategic plan's existence was contributed by the lack of involvement of subordinate and junior staff members in the strategic planning process. Educators complained that only the officers-in-charge (OCs) were oriented and sensitised regarding the strategic plan in 2016. They also received one copy each for their stations. Educators claimed that the OCs did not disseminate the content to the rest of the staff members since the majority of the OCs also did not understand the seemingly new strategic planning phenomenon. The three educators (12%) who

claimed to have knowledge of the strategic plan reported to have accessed it through their means; two of them downloaded it from the department's website which had just been re-launched in 2020. This finding concurs with Kayuni (2017) who observes that employees' ignorance of the contents of the strategic plan was among the crucial factors negatively affecting the successful implementation of strategic plans in the public sector in Malawi. The non-awareness of the contents made officers stick to their traditional routine or ad-hoc activities not included in the strategic plan as suggested in Bunning's (1992) model. Alfayez (2020) and Salum et al. (2017) also observe the exclusion of some stakeholders; in this case, educators can limit the anticipated benefits and relevance of the strategy.

(b) MPS is still stuck in the punishment philosophy.

Many educators perceived MPS as still stuck in the punitive philosophy even though it claimed to be going towards correctional service in its strategic vision. According to them, rehabilitation philosophy which embraces mandatory education of school-aged young offenders is just on paper.

*On the ground, I can say we are punishment oriented, while on paper, we are rehabilitation oriented. If you compare the prison of today and of the past, there is not much difference. In the past, prison farms were used as punishment centres as they implemented the court's penalty of imprisonment with hard labour on offenders. That kind of treatment is still here. Inmates are still used as labour. What I see is the change of name from 'prison farm' to 'young offenders' rehabilitation centre', but those punitive farming activities are still forced on the young ones at the expense of their education (F1/EDU/03).*

The general perception of the educators was that education as a rehabilitation activity was just exhibited in the papers to shield some punitive traits that still existed in the penitentiaries in Malawi. Another educator concurred that there was no effort toward implementing the strategic plan's content. The leadership lacked a mindset change to move out of the status quo.

*There is a need for a mindset change in leadership. The authorities put in place a strategic plan with good content but did not use it... With the content of the strategic plan, prison education should have improved by now. But what are we seeing? The same structures existed long ago, and even the level of resources is dwindling compared to the past (F4/EDU/20).*

(c) A conflict between education and farming policies.

The findings of this study showed conflicting interests between education and farming policies. According to one educator at facility one, "Despite this facility being called a rehabilitation

*centre, what I have observed is that the management values much on farming more than rehabilitation activities." Another educator observed that the imposition of farming targets and not targets related to inmates' education to officers-in-charge (OCs) was a reason enough to point out where the prison authorities' interests lay.*

*We are talking about a young offenders' rehabilitation centre here; hence, education issues needed to be given 100% full support. But you will find that every year the department is giving farming targets to the OCs. So it means that the department is now turning this station from being a rehabilitation centre into a farming centre. Farming pushes the OCs to work hard to impress their bosses, hence prioritising the use of incarcerated young ones as labour for farming activities rather than educating them to meet their targets (F1/EDU/04).*

Many educators viewed that the farming policy was considered supreme because of the immediate outputs in terms of harvests. Thus, the department had to make the hard decision of discontinuing the provision of education at Facility Five for full concentration on farming.

*It is about the department policies, but it is impossible to close the farm for the school because the prison authorities rely on this farm for the production of food. So I don't think it can be an easy decision to stop farming for the schooling of these young offenders. Maybe if they bring adult inmates to be engaged in farming and let the young ones go and attend school; that would work (F5/PO/25).*

#### (d) Inadequacy of resources

Educators observed that the inadequacy of resources throughout the five years of the strategic plan implementation also contributed to the mismatch. According to one of the educators at facility one, *"comparing to the contents of the strategic plan and the resources that we have, it was impossible for them to be fulfilled."* According to another educator at Facility Four;

*We lack resources; we depend on well-wishers. As you can see, we only have four classrooms but offer lessons in all classes from Standard 1 to Form 4. As a remedy, we combine classes which are not ideal. But we do combine classes also because of the shortage of teachers. We only have eight teachers against 12 classes, which is not ideal. We don't have a laboratory, and in the library, we only have outdated books which are not in our syllabus (F4/EDU/16).*

The educators observed that the strategic education objective would have been accomplished if the allocation of educational resources was mandatory in the facilities' budgets.

#### (e) Lack of external stakeholders' support

Apart from the government's annual budgetary allocations and MPS revenues, the strategic plan was projected to source funds and other resources from external stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education and development partners. It was observed that the education section hardly received resources from development partners. Moreover, the Ministry of Education never deployed teachers to prison schools, as observed by one educator.

*Even though the strategic plan mentioned the plan to engage the Ministry of Education in providing qualified teachers to all schools in prisons, there has been nothing like that. The schools are still surviving on the mercy of the interested prison officers and volunteer inmates who are teaching, of which many are not qualified teachers. And, we don't have good cooperation and working relationships with the surrounding schools to benefit resource-wise (F1/EDU/02)*

Salum et al. (2017) argue that stakeholders' support is essential in the strategic plan implementation process. In this study, the lack of the Ministry of Education's support as an external stakeholder affected the implementation of the educational objective of the MPS strategic plan since the unavailability of qualified teachers, in addition to many other resources, hindered the provision of quality education.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

From the findings of this study, it was evident that there was a mismatch between the content of the strategic education objective of the MPS 2016-2021 Strategic Plan and the actual reality in the five facilities after the expiry of the implementation period. Relating to Bunning's model of strategic planning (e.g. Bunning, 1992; Johanson, 2019; Kayuni, 2017), it was generally found that the Malawi Prisons Service's strategic planning exhibited characteristics of a ritual approach as far as the strategic educational objective was concerned. Firstly, it was revealed that the whole strategic planning process was merely done to please the international funding authorities. Evidently, the strategic plan was hardly used in the budgeting process of the education objective since the educators reported that the facilities did not allocate funds for the education function or the schools in their respective facilities. The schools were surviving at the mercy of the local well-wishers. In the words of Bunning (1992), the strategic planning process was just "a ritual to be performed essentially to meet the expectation or demands of ...funding bodies" (p. 55). Therefore, the aim was the existence of the document, not its achievement or fulfilment of the planned activities.

Secondly, the whole strategic planning process was just a show of maturity and strategic organisational growth on the part of the MPS, as argued by Al-Mawdieh (2020) and Johanson (2019). Coming from the backdrop that the 2016-2021 strategic plan was the first to see the light of day in the MPS after several failed attempts, the findings suggest that the whole process was done to adhere to

the government directive (Kayuni, 2017). It aimed to enable the MPS to be labelled among the public institutions with their strategic plans in a country where many public sector organisations had not yet developed their plans (Kayuni, 2017; Sikwese, 2013). 47% of the strategic budget projection was allocated to the education objective to improve offenders' education for their rehabilitation, as suggested in many studies (e.g. Duwe & Clark, 2017; Jäggi & Kliwer, 2020). However, less than 1% was allocated and spent on educational activities. Instead of making strides, the education provision was retrogressed, evidenced by resource inadequacy and the discontinued provision of education at one young offenders' centre.

Finally, ritualism in this strategic planning process was evident from the revelation that 88% of the educators did not even know that the department had a strategic plan. In a penitentiary setting, the educators are amongst the facility personnel who are considered enlightened compared to the security staff (Kajawo, 2022). If the educators were ignorant of the existence of the strategic plan, it could be worse with the security staff. True to Bunning's ritual approach, the strategic plan was put on office shelves, quietly gathering dust. In the study, it was revealed that the authorities prioritised making young offenders work on prison farms as labourers to fulfil facilities' harvest targets. This decision even resulted in the discontinued provision of offenders' education services at facility five since education was perceived as disrupting farming activities. These findings show that the strategic plan did not guide the authorities' daily activities at the five facilities. These findings concur with Kayuni (2017) that Malawi's public sector strategic planning process lacked the influence and effective leadership to enhance reforms effectively.

### **Policy Implications**

Since the present study revealed a mismatch between educational planning and reality, correctional administrations need to prioritise the provision of quality education in correctional policies. The priority ought to be the school-aged offenders who need an education "meeting the minimal standards of mandatory public education" to enhance their desistance and post-incarceration schooling (Carter, 2019; Gary, 2014; Hawley et al., 2013; Jäggi & Kliwer, 2020). In strategic planning, officers in charge and educators need to be fully involved in the whole process. The involvement should not just be during the launch of the strategic plan document. According to Bunning's 'learning approach', the key stakeholders' full involvement enhances their convergent understanding for successful implementation (Bunning, 1992, p.57). Hyman (1999) argues that organisational plans, policies and procedures can be excellent tools if the staff members know them.

Furthermore, there is a need to ensure harmony and unity in the implementation of various organisational policies. This study revealed a clash between the educational and farming policies in the MPS, which resulted in the young offenders' right to education being compromised. Undeniably,

farming is as important as prisoners' education because it improves the organisation's food situation. However, forcing young people to work on the farm at the expense of their education is barbaric and tantamount to slavery. There is a need for deliberate policy that protects school-aged young offenders from being incarcerated at farming prisons. They need to be lodged at rehabilitation facilities where they can access education to enhance their rehabilitation and successful community re-entry.

#### **Conflict of interest**

No potential conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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#### **Credit Author Statement**

*Author 1:* Conceptualisation, Data collection, Analysis, Writing - Original draft preparation

*Author 2:* Data analysis, Methodology, Writing - Review & Editing

#### **Ethical Statement**

We act in accordance with scientific ethical principles and rules from all stages of the study, including preparation, data collection, analysis, and presentation of information; we have cited all data and information not obtained within the scope of this study and we have included these sources in the bibliography; we declare that we have not made any changes in the data used and that we comply with ethical duties and responsibilities by accepting all the terms and conditions of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). At any time, we declare that we consent to all moral and legal consequences that may arise in the event that a situation contrary to this statement we have made regarding the study is detected.

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