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Integration of Ethics in Malawian Public Accountancy Education

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Keywords: *content analysis, ethics, malawi.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate scandals have historically been instrumental in revealing the need to inculcate in students the significance of ethics and the increasing attention towards teaching of business ethics (Ho and Lin, 2006; Singh and Poduval, 2009; Brenner et al., 2012). The current study comes in the wake of a financial scandal in the Malawian public sector. The scandal involved massive looting of public money by public servants at Malawi's Capitol Hill in collusion with business persons. According to a forensic audit report, the looting involved among other things "extraction of cash in local currency through systematic money laundering activities using private companies as well as through fraudulent payments to dubious overseas companies in foreign currency" (Nhlema and Khanje, 2014, February, 24). The audit further revealed that subsequently attempts made to delete the transaction data in the government's Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) (Nhlema and Khanje, 2014, February, 24). The audit highlighted that the looting was premeditated and planned and not opportunistic (Nhlema and Khanje, 2014, February, 24).

Although the investigations are still underway it is apparent that accountants in the public system played some role directly or indirectly contrary to the ideals of

the profession. This is evident by significant blame placed on the office of Accountant General by the forensic audit report. Besides, accountants serve as financial reporters and intermediaries (Williams and Elson, 2010), hence generally expected to have had some knowledge as the transactions are processed by them. Coincidentally or not, the forensic auditors found that basic accounting procedures and protocols, including those required by the treasury instruction and Public Finance Management Act, were not being followed or applied. Thus the scandal raised some questions regarding ethical conduct and professional responsibility of the accountants.

Basically, accountants' role is critical to society (Williams and Elson, 2010). Ideally accountants serve public interest and this is regarded as critical and the primary obligation of the profession (Davenport and Dellaportas, 2009; Williams and Elson, 2010). According to Davenport and Dellaportas (2009) public interest is best served when ethical standards and principles of professional conduct are voluntarily and impartially practised. Accordingly, a deviation from public interest role, whether real or perceived, may be viewed as uncaring, irresponsible, self-promoting and untrustworthy (Davenport and Dellaportas, 2009). Generally ethical improprieties by accountants do not only bring disrepute to profession but are also detrimental to society (Williams and Elson, 2010). This is evident in Malawi as the immediate result of the financial scandal was suspension of budgetary support by the donor community which is impacting negatively on the poor and innocent citizenry.

The paper was not intended to place a blame on accountants, as many other people in various professions were also involved. However as an accounting educator my thoughts were on the role of accountants who are products of the accounting education system which I am part. As the scandal borders on ethical conduct, my major concern was on whether ethics and professional responsibility is being adequately covered in Malawian accounting education curriculums. The focus was on the accounting curriculums that are locally developed by statutory-established accountancy educational institutions in the country. These institutions being public are generally expected to promote public interest and be models to private institutions. Thus their curriculums are expected to represent the basic standard that the government

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expects to be imparted in the accounting professionals in Malawi. Besides, private institutions are just being established as such most of the accounting professionals are products of the public institutions. The fundamental question was whether the public accounting education in Malawi has all it takes to develop and strengthen ethical conduct and professional responsibility of its graduates. It should be noted that "public accounting education" in the case of this study meant that offered by statutory-established institutions.

International Accounting Education Standards Board (2006) observed that ethical or moral competency is an important attribute of an accounting professional. Consequently, Albrecht et al., (2006) posited that before graduates are permitted to enter accounting profession, they should be required to demonstrate that they have a personal ethical understanding and that they can translate their ethical understanding to accounting and other business settings. Albrecht et al., (2006) noted that assessment of such translation and values should be part of every professional entry-level examination. As such accountancy educational institutions have an important role of ensuring that ethics is impart and students display ability to translate the same in practice before graduation.

Accounting education is considered part of the process of developing necessary competency levels (International Accounting Education Standards Board, 2006). Apparently, accounting ethics education is considered as an effective means which the accountancy profession and the academic community use to strengthen ethical conduct in practice (Chan and Leung, 2006). Sisaye (2011) pointed out that accounting ethics education has a normative and functional role that has positive intervention and reinforcement on developing students' ethical sensitivity and moral judgements. According to Albrecht et al. (2006), teaching students how to translate their personal ethical understanding to the business world is as important as developing a strong ethical understanding.

Bampton and MacLagann (2005) suggested that academic institutions should aim to produce graduates who are ethically aware and capable of making 'right' decisions. In harmony, Ho and Lin (2006) asserted that a part from acting the role of fostering manpower, educational institutions takes the responsibility of infusing ethics into students. Accordingly accounting educators have an ethical responsibility to teach and show the importance of having high ethical values (Albrecht et al., 2006). Armstrong et al., (2003) highlighted that educators "set the stage" for ethical behaviour by increasing moral sensitivity, moral reasoning and moral motivation. Thus McManus and Subramaniam (2009) observed that studying ethics education at the professional and tertiary levels was clearly timely and critical.

The current study was aimed at examining whether ethics is adequately integrated in public accounting education in Malawi. Although ethics integration in curriculums may not be the ultimate solution, it is however an important part of the solution that cannot be ignored. The curriculums generally determine what is imparted to the students. The study evaluated ethics integration in the curriculums of Malawian public accountancy institutions namely: Institute of Chartered Accountants in Malawi (ICAM) and the University of Malawi (UNIMA).

II. STRUCTURE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTANCY EDUCATION IN MALAWI

The local public accountancy education system in Malawi can be segregated into three basic entry levels; certificate level, diploma level and degree level. There are currently two main players namely: the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Malawi (ICAM) and the University of Malawi (UNIMA) through the Malawi Polytechnic its constituent college.

ICAM has recently established through the merger of the Public Accountancy Examination Council of Malawi (PAECM) and the Society of Accountants in Malawi (SOCAM). The main functions of PAECM in relation to accountancy education included curriculum development, students' registration, administration of examinations and awarding the certificates. The PAECM was offering certificate and diploma programmes. These programmes were wholly adopted by ICAM; and additionally a Malawian professional qualification programme was introduced. The professional qualification programme is being offered with assistance from Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). The current study evaluates the certificate and diploma curriculums as the professional qualification programme started enrolling in June 2014 as such its impact is yet to be felt on the ground.

The ICAM certificate constitute the certificate level of the Malawian public accountancy education. It is the basic entry level that has four courses (see *TABLE 1*). Its minimum completion period is six months with a maximum of two years. Upon passed all the four courses a Certificate in Financial Accounting (CFA) is awarded to the candidate.

Table 1 : Courses under the certificate level

TABLE 1: Courses under the certificate level	
1	Business Communication
2	Practical Mathematics and Computing
3	Business Knowledge
4	Business Accounting

The ICAM diploma constitutes the diploma level. At this level, the curriculum has twelve courses as shown in *TABLE 2*. It minimum completion period is one year and six months, and upon passing all the courses, a diploma in accounting is awarded to the candidate.

As already noted, ICAM wholly adopted the PAECM certificate and diploma curriculums at its establishment; the names and number of courses remained the same, however revisions were subsequently made to the content. Thus in order to evaluate the impact of revision on ethics integration, the study evaluated both the PAECM certificate and diploma curriculums hereafter called the “old curriculums” and the ICAM curriculums hereafter called the “revised curriculums”.

Table 2 : Courses under the diploma level

TABLE 2 : Courses under the diploma level			
1	Accounting 1	7	Economics
2	Accounting 2	8	Communication
3	Taxation	9	Information Systems
4	Management	10	Business Law
5	Auditing	11	Company Law
6	Business Mathematics and Statistics	12	Costing and Budgetary Control

Finally, the degree programme offered by the University Of Malawi (UNIMA) constitutes the degree level. UNIMA is the oldest and is considered the top university in Malawi. The university offers a degree of Bachelor of Accountancy through the department of accountancy at one of its constituent colleges, the Malawi Polytechnic.

The degree programme is for four years. The curriculum of the programme was recently revised. Presently the revised curriculum is in process of being fully implemented. It is at the moment being offered to first and second year students only. On the other hand, the old curriculum is in the process of being phased out.

The study examined both the old and the new curriculums as they are both in force, and in order also to measure the impact of the revision on ethics integration. The courses under the old curriculum are presented in *TABLE 3A*. Unlike the old curriculum, the new curriculum follows a modular system, as such *TABLE 3B* exhibits the modules of the revised curriculum.

TABLE 3A Courses of Old Curriculum of the degree programme			
Year One		Year Three	
1.	Business Numeracy	1.	Communication
2.	Organisational Behaviour	2.	Management Accounting
3.	Financial Accounting 1	3.	Financial Accounting 3

4.	General principles of Law	4.	Systems
5.	Microeconomics	5.	Auditing 1
6.	Communication	6.	Company Law
7.	Introduction to HIV and Aids	7.	Management Quantitative Techniques
Year Two		Year Four	
1.	Financial Accounting 2	1.	Financial Accounting 4
2.	Cost Accounting	2.	Financial Management
3.	Communication	3.	Auditing 2
4.	Macroeconomics	4.	Taxation 2
5.	Application Packages	5.	Strategic management
6.	Taxation 1	6.	Accounting Packages
7.	Management principles and practice		
8.	Commercial and International Law		

TABLE 3B Modules the new curriculum of the degree programme			
Year One			
Semester 1		Semester 2	
1.	Fundamentals of Accounting	1.	Business Accounting I
2.	General Principles of Law	2.	Introduction to Calculus
3.	Business Numeracy	3.	Labour Law
4.	Microeconomics	4.	Macroeconomics
5.	English for Academic Purposes I	5.	English for Academic Purposes II
6.	Organisational Behaviour I	6.	Organisational Behaviour II
Year Two			
Semester 1		Semester 2	
1.	Business Accounting II	1.	Business Accounting III
2.	Cost Accounting	2.	Costing and Budgetary Control
3.	Commercial Law	3.	Business Statistics
4.	Management Information Systems	4.	Organisational and Managerial Communication I
5.	Fundamentals of Statistics	5.	Computer Applications
6.	Business Communication	6.	Taxation
Year Three			
Semester 1		Semester 2	
1.	Financial Reporting I	1.	Financial Reporting II

2. Corporate Law I	2. Corporate Law II
3. Information for Decision-Making	3. Performance Management
4. Internal Controls and Reviews	4. Business Research Methods
5. Management Quantitative Techniques	5. Organisational and Managerial Communication II
6. Principles of Management	6. Project Management
Year Four	
Semester 1	Semester 2
Advanced Financial Reporting	1. Human Resource Management
Financial Management	2. Risk Management
Auditing and Assurance Services	3. Security and Portfolio Management
4. Corporate Governance and Ethics	4. Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management
5. Strategic Management	5. Research Project
6. Accounting Packages	6. Advanced Taxation

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The subject of ethics generally continues to take a centre-stage in academia, as well as a research theme (Salleh and Ahmad, 2012). Shawver (2006) noted that accounting cannot continue to operate in a vacuum, expecting that accounting decisions would not pose ethical dilemmas with impact on individuals, companies, and society. As a result, Shawver (2006) was of the view that it is important that accounting students be educated about ethics prior to sending them off into the profession. Thus educational institutions have a responsibility to acquaint their students with the ethical challenges they will face in their careers and the importance of professional responsibility (Ho and Lin, 2006; Shawver, 2006).

Supporting the importance of ethics education in promotion of ethical conduct in accounting students, Bonawitz (2002) cited in Ho and Lin (2006) found that students exposed to courses having a purposeful focus on professional ethics and ethical issues, show significantly greater growth in the use of principled moral reasoning than similar students not exposed to such courses. McManus and Subramaniam (2009) identified ethics education at university as a significant factor affecting perceptions of the seriousness of an unethical issue as well as the behavioural intentions of accountants early in their career. Thus McManus and Subramaniam (2009) considered the results as clear indication that university curricula need to pay more attention to the quality and extent of ethics content in the accounting programmes.

Although extant literature tends to support ethics education, there are some diverging views on whether ethics can really be effectively taught to students and foster ethical behaviour. Ho and Lin (2006) attempted to answer this question of effectiveness with a "yes" and "no" answer after carrying a review a literature of both positions. They based their answer on the understanding that it all depends on the goals of the ethics education. Ho and Lin (2006) stated that based on the literature favouring ethics education, the answer would be "Yes":

"...If the goals of business ethics education are to provide theories, models, approaches, examples or case studies which might be useful in handling business ethical dilemmas, to make students more sensitive to the ethical implications of some business activities, and to provide students with a set of tools that could help them analyze difficult ethical situations later in their business careers."

Ho and Lin (2006) noted that there is good amount of evidence that reveals that such goals can be achieved through teaching business ethics in the classroom.

On the other hand, Ho and Lin (2006) observed that the answer would be "No":

"If the goals are to create value systems that will enable students to act ethically, and to make students having the moral will to choose the ethically correct action even when it conflicts with self-interest."

Despite the side of the argument one may be, Ho and Lin (2006) argued that:

"...In the complexity of today's business environment, students still need additional guidance for making ethical decisions, which can help them to recognize the ethical dilemmas that are likely to arise in their jobs, as well as the rules, laws, and norms that apply in the business context. They can learn reasoning strategies that can be used to arrive at a better ethical decision, and can grasp an understanding of the complexities of organizational life that may conflict with one's desire to do the right thing."

This position appears to be the one taken by many in the profession and seems to have some empirical support. Jackling et al. (2007) found a general belief that ethics education is of importance in the education of accountants in all sectors of the economy. Kerr and Smith (1995) cited in Ho and Lin (2006) found that ethics education can increase skills in identifying and analyzing problems, essential in handling conflicts of values which arise between the practitioners, clients and society. Chan and Leung (2006) found that accounting students that receiving a specific accounting ethics intervention were more sensitive to ethical issues in a professional scenario, which according to them suggested the possible impact of accounting ethics

education on accounting students' ethical sensitivity development. IFAC member bodies in a survey also expressed very strongly the view that ethics education is necessary to develop a sense of ethical responsibility for future accountants; improve the moral standards and attitudes of future accountants; develop the problem solving skills that have ethical implications; and to develop a sense of professional responsibility (International Accounting Education Standards Board, 2006). Singh and Poduval (2009) also found that even accounting lecturers are aware of a need to teach accounting ethics to accounting students and most of the lecturers were teaching accounting ethics as embedded in the relevant courses. Thus ethics continues to be integrated in many accounting curriculums.

Integration of ethics is particularly of essence with shifting emphasis of the role of accounting in harmony with the dynamism of the modern environment. Dellaportas et al. (2006) noted that in the modern environment, technical focus of accounting education should be de-emphasized and should be replaced with an appreciation of the role of accounting in the political, economic and social contexts. Mohamed and Lashine (2003) observed that in designing the curriculum, effort should be made not to have the courses taught as a series of technical rules rather the curriculum should expose students to broader businesses by using real-world examples, emphasize on global perspectives. Mohamed and Lashine (2003) further intimated that accounting education should provide students not only with the knowledge and skills required, but also with the know-how that enables them to apply those skills i.e. wisdom, critical ability and ethics needed for them to make the right decision at the right time. Besides, Kermis and Kermis (n.d.) indicated that the educational process must recognize that ethics is not simply the awareness of a code of professional ethics. Thus, programs need to be designed that bring the issues and development of personal and professional ethics into the realm of a core competency required of all those entering the accounting profession (Kermis and Kermis, n.d.).

There is really a need to strengthen the curriculums in relation to ethics and professional responsibility. Further to that continuous improvements to the curriculum must be made to ensure continued relevance. According to Kannaiah and Kumar (2009) ethics education must be kept up-to-date. They noted that ethics education needs to be a life-long learning commitment beginning early in a prequalification programme and continuing throughout the career. According to Shawver (2006) ethics can either integrated at the course level, or at the curriculum level. Course level integration involves having a stand-alone course that focuses on ethics, while at curriculum level integration is where issues of ethics are embedded

within the other courses in the curriculum. Mohamed and Lashine (2003) posited that the curriculum should have a course in values, ethics, and integrity. Albrecht et al. (2006) asserted that having a dedicated ethics course that teaches basic business ethical principles is highly valued; however they also observed that it is most important that ethics form part of every taught course. Furthermore Albrecht et al. (2006) observed that efforts are needed to make sure that in every taught business course, whether it is accounting, marketing, finance, strategy or organisational behaviour, is able to force students face ethical dilemmas. Thus Albrecht et al. (2006) seem to suggest integration of ethics both at course and curriculum levels.

Williams and Elson (2010) also favored integration of ethics at both curriculum and course levels to ensure efficacy of ethics education. Williams and Elson (2010) observed that apart from being covered in every accounting course, ethics should also have its own place and focus in the accounting curriculum. They noted that a separate ethics course will equip accounting students with the knowledge, skills and expertise they need to be successful in today's business environment. Supporting the position, Williams and Elson (2010) explained that when ethics is integrated into existing courses, it inevitably gets lost in other accounting material. Thus if accounting ethics is important to the accounting profession, then it should also be the focus of a separate course. In the same vein, Salleh and Ahmad (2012) intimated that a special stand-alone course, over and above the practice to embedding ethics throughout the curriculum course is necessary.

Thus ethics should be taught as part of the pre-qualifying programs and there should be a dedicated unit as well as integrated within other units of study (Jackling et al., 2007). Following this position, Albrecht et al. (2006) posited that in all courses and cases ethics should be taught and assignments given that discuss situations in which students have to identify potential conflicts of interest, fraudulent behaviour, illegal activities, and business practices that push the limits of propriety. Furthermore, Albrecht et al. (2006) suggest that ethical dilemmas should not always be explicit and students should not always know that ethics is an issue in assignments and cases. Sisaye (2011) further noted that ethics coverage in accounting can become more applied and practical when the instruction methodologies follow experiential organizational-based internship education. While Doost (1999) highlighted that integrity should be made pervasive, for it to be internalized and more than teaching and preaching it, the educators must project it in all their dealings and actions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that students have a critical role to play in ensuring effectiveness of ethics education. This is the case because ethics

education in classroom merely sets the stage for ethical behaviour by increasing moral sensitivity, moral reasoning and moral motivation, but students are the ones that take the last step (Armstrong et al., 2003). Thus in order to increase accounting students, moral motivation, Armstrong et al. (2003) suggested the need for the following:

1. *Exhorting students to good behaviour, pointing out that they, indeed, are masters of their moral selves, and encouraging them to take pride in their profession.*
2. *Using of accounting exemplars to help instil moral virtues in accounting students.*

Besides, Armstrong et al. (2003) urged all accounting educators of the need to recognize their important part in students' moral maturation. Pointing out that:

"Accounting faculty are the leaders of that branch of the accounting community to which students are first exposed, the academic accounting community. As such, they are responsible for setting the moral tone of the community and providing a nurturing environment in which ethical motivation and ethical behaviour can flourish".

Finally, cognisance of some challenges that can have impact on the effectiveness of ethics education should also be taken. Davenport and Dellaportas (2009) noted that formal education process appears successful in transferring knowledge on the public interest, but appears to be less effective in teaching the mechanisms by which such knowledge is applied in practice. Thus Davenport and Dellaportas (2009) was of the view that greater emphasis regarding ethics should be allocated to the mechanisms by which the transfer of knowledge to the workplace becomes effective. Besides, balance should be strike to ensure that ethics education is not rule-based. According to Kermis and Kermis (n.d.), simply following the rules [including the code of ethics] is not sufficient in many situations, efforts should be made to ensure that accounting education train leaders of the profession who will be honest, trustworthy and of ultimate personal integrity.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to measure the integration of ethics in the Malawian public accountancy curriculums. Thus the study sampled the old and revised curriculums of Malawian public accountancy education. As already shown in section two above, there are two statutory-established institutions offering accounting education in Malawi namely, Institute of Chartered Accountants in Malawi (ICAM) and the University of Malawi. ICAM offers a certificate in financial accounting and a diploma in accounting while the UNIMA offers bachelor of accountancy.

The study employed content analysis methodology. The study involved analysis of the three curriculums in order to measure integration of ethics. According to Sweeney and Coughlan (2011) content analysis is a study technique used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within text. Furthermore, Krippendorff (1980) cited in Ahmad et al. (2003) highlighted that content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data according to their context. Thus the syllabuses of each course/modules under each curriculum (both old and revised) were obtain and examined to find out whether ethics was explicitly or implicitly covered therein.

Since ethics can be integrated into the accounting curriculum either at the course level, or at the curriculum level (Shawver, 2006), the study made the analysis at both levels. At course level, the name of the course or module and their aims or objectives and indicative contents were analysed to determine whether the course/module could be regarded as a "stand-alone" ethics course/module. At curriculum level, the study involved word by word analysis of the syllabuses of each and every course or module.

In using the methodology, ethics was assumed to have been integrated in a particular syllabus if ethics or ethics related words are mentioned explicitly or implicitly taken within the context used. Thus, analysis involved identifying ethics related words such as ethics, ethical conduct/practice/behaviour, moral, morality, code of conduct and/or ethics, professional conduct, standards of behaviour, values, regulations, laws etc. The analysis was centred on evaluating particular syllabus' description, aims/objectives, the intended learning outcomes and the indicative content.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the content analysis of the three curriculums and ensuing discussions.

a) Certificate level

i. Old curriculum

The content examination of the "old curriculum" of the Certificate in Financial Accounting suggested that ethics was not integrated in it. The curriculum had no stand-alone ethics module; and furthermore, a word by word analysis of the syllabuses of all the four courses (see TABLE 1) found no ethics related words or a context from which inference to cover of ethics could be made.

ii. Revised curriculum

Analysis of the "revised curriculum" indicated integration of ethics at curriculum level only as it has been integrated "Business Knowledge" course. The curriculum presents "corporate governance" as one of

the five major syllabus areas and one of its learning objectives is to “understand the role of governance in the management of the business”. Under these the learning outcomes include to:

- *Identify main players for an effective governance structure, and how ethics cement such a culture; and*
- *State meaning of money laundering, corruption and fraud.*

Furthermore in “Business Accounting” course an inference can be made of the intention to cover ethics. One of the learning outcomes of the course is for the students to demonstrate understanding of the regulation of accounting in Malawi. Specifically the students are required to:

1. *Understand the evolution of the legal and regulatory environment affecting accounting in Malawi.*
2. *Understanding the current regulatory environment of accounting in Malawi, including the main agencies and instruments such as:*
 - I. *The Malawi stock exchange.*
 - II. *the Institute of chartered accountants in Malawi (ICAM)*
 - III. *Malawi Accountants Board.*
 - IV. *The companies and Taxation Acts.*

These elements generally constitute the regulatory framework for ethics implementation and enforcement. It must also be noted that ICAM wholly adopted the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) code of ethics. Thus it is expected that the discussion of the regulatory framework will include the ethics regime.

The analysis suggests that significant strides have been made to integrate ethics in the certificate curriculum; however there is still more room for improvement. Currently ethics is embedded within corporate governance and deduced from regulations. There is danger that it inevitably gets lost in other material (Williams and Elson, 2010). ICAM may consider upgrading ethics to be among the major syllabus areas.

b) Diploma level

i. Old curriculum

The analysis of the old diploma curriculum revealed that ethics was not integrated at course level as it did not have a stand-alone ethics course. However, a word by word analysis of the syllabuses of the all the twelve courses, revealed that ethics is only integrated in “auditing” course. Review of the auditing syllabus, indicated that ethics was covered under a topic called “legal and professional requirements of the auditor” which among other things covered “rules of professional conduct” and “auditor’s guidelines”. Furthermore the

under a topic called “nature and purpose of audit” and the following aspects were covered:

1. *The role of auditing guidelines.*
2. *Role of the Malawi Accountants Board and the Society of Accountants in Malawi.*
3. *Malawi Auditing guidelines.*

This suggests that ethics is covered as “an appendage to an auditing course” (Wyatt and Gaa, 2004 cited in Shawver, 2006). Such integration in a single course may generally give impression that ethics is an issue of essence to auditing thus deemphasising its importance to other branches of accounting.

ii. Revised curriculum

The review of the revised diploma curriculum indicated that there still is no stand-alone ethics course. However a word by word analysis suggested that ethical issues have been integrated in four of the twelve courses. The courses are: “Accounting 1”, “Accounting 2”, “Auditing” and “Management”.

Similar to the “Business accounting” course under the certificate curriculum, one of the outcomes of “Accounting 1” course is for the students to demonstrate understanding of regulation of accounting in Malawi. Students are therefore required to: Understand the evolution of the legal and regulatory environment affecting accounting in Malawi. Understanding the current regulatory environment of accounting in Malawi, including the main agencies and instruments such as:

- I. *The Malawi stock exchange.*
- II. *The institute of chartered accountants in Malawi*
- III. *Malawi Accountants Board.*
- IV. *The companies and Taxation Acts.*

The same regulatory issues are also covered in “Accounting 2” course such as understanding the role of the local regulatory system including institute of chartered accountants in Malawi (ICAM) and Malawi Accountants Board and the role of the Companies Act relating to governance issues in respect of financial reporting.

Furthermore, the revised “Auditing” course syllabus has incorporated relatively more ethics issues. One of the objectives of the course is for the student to understand the regulatory framework within which the accountancy profession operates. The learning outcome under this area requires the candidate to understand the importance of ethical behaviour and identify issues relating to: integrity, objectivity, competence, confidentiality and courtesy behaviour amongst other. Other issues include requiring the students to:

1. *Explain the auditors’ responsibility and liability with respect to money laundering and other illegal acts or non-compliance with other relevant laws and regulations.*

2. *State the role of ethical code and identify features of the professional ethics adopted by the IFAC, and how they work in public interest.*
3. *Suggest courses of actions that may be taken to resolve ethical conflicts of interests relating to the ethical fundamental principles identified above.*
4. *State the importance of confidentiality, identifying the risk of accidental disclosure of client's information, and stating exceptional cases when this may not apply.*
5. *Define objectivity and independence and recognise why those undertaking assurance engagement are required to be independent of their clients.*
6. *State to fundamental ethical principles and independence of assurance providers, as identified by the IFAC, and possible safeguard to eliminate or reduce such threats.*

Finally, one of the learning objectives of the "Management" course is for the student to be able to "explain the ethical considerations in management". The syllabus provides for ethics under "corporate governance" that has the following learning outcomes:

1. *Define corporate governance.*
2. *Identify components of corporate governance.*
3. *Explain the concepts of whistle blowing.*
4. *Describe corporate governance practices.*
5. *Explain professional values and ethics.*
6. *Explain the strategies to manage social responsibility and ethics.*

All in all the analysis above indicates that the revision of the curriculum was a step in right direction in terms of broadening ethics integration. It is thus incumbent on the educators effectively teach and the examiners to effectively assess. On the other hand there is still a need to improve the integration. Currently ethical issues are carrying very low weighting as they have been embedded within other areas. There is need to have ethics integrated a major syllabus area and its assessment should be emphasised.

c) Degree curriculum

i. Old curriculum

The analysis of the old degree curriculum showed that it had no stand-alone ethics course. Similar to the old diploma curriculum, ethics was only incorporated in auditing courses only. As shown in TABLE 3A, the old curriculum had two auditing courses namely; "Auditing I" and "Auditing II" which were taught in third and four years respectively.

The word by word analysis of the syllabuses, revealed that one of the aims of the "Auditing I" was "to ensure that students understand professional codes of ethics and behaviour". Furthermore one of the main topics of the course was "Professional and Legal

Requirements of the Audit and the Auditor". Under the topic there were the following sub-topics namely:

1. *Responsibility under statute and case law.*
2. *Independence.*
3. *Professional requirements.*
4. *Conduct and ethics.*
5. *Negligence.*

On the other hand, one of the objectives of "Auditing II" was for the students to be able to "demonstrate their ability to work within a professional and ethical framework". The course had two of the main topics covering ethics namely; "professional ethical consideration" and "current issues and developments". Under "professional ethical consideration" the syllabus provided the following:

1. *Professional responsibility and liability – covering issues such as fraud and error, professional liability (including negligence), misconduct, expectation gap, professional indemnity insurance and insider dealing.*
2. *Regulatory environment – covering issues such as corporate governance, Code of Best Practice, laws and regulations in an audit of financial statements and money laundering.*

Whereas under "current issues and developments" the following ethics related issues were covered:

1. *Professional ethics.*
2. *Corporate governance.*
3. *Fraud.*

Thus the analysis of the old degree curriculum above suggested similar trend as found in relation to old diploma curriculum of incorporate ethics only in auditing courses.

ii. Revised curriculum

The analysis of new curriculum revealed both the course level integration and curriculum level integration. The revised curriculum has a stand-alone ethics module called "Corporate Governance and Ethics". As exhibited by TABLE 3B, the course will be taught in the first semester of fourth year. The module descriptor in part states that the module:

"Introduces students to the concept of business ethics, an overview of major ethical issues that businesses face today and a discussion of moral philosophy through an understanding of classical and contemporary ethical theories".

The aim of the module is "to equip students with knowledge and skills necessary to enable them to act ethically". The ethics related learning outcomes include:

1. *Discuss different ethical concepts, ethical philosophy and how each relates to the organisation.*
2. *Distinguish between Business Ethics and social responsibility.*
3. *Discuss the code of ethics for accountants.*
4. *Identify ethical issues in the context of business decision making.*
5. *Apply moral philosophies to Business Ethics.*
6. *Discuss the impact of the business environment on ethical decision making.*

The indicative ethics related content includes;

1. *Moral Philosophies in Business Ethics*
2. *Codes of ethics (SOCAM, ACCA, CIMA, IIA)*
3. *Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks*
4. *The Impact of the Business Environment on Ethical Decision Making*
5. *The Impact of Organizational Structure and Culture*
6. *The Influence of Significant Others in the Organization*
7. *The Role of Opportunity and Conflict*
8. *Controlling Business Ethics in the Organization*
9. *International Business Ethics*

On the other hand, word by word analysis of the syllabuses of the all the other modules revealed five other modules with ethics embedded within them. These are “English for Academic Purposes II”, “Principles of Management”, “Corporate Law 1”, “Strategic Management” and “Auditing and Assurance Services”.

The study revealed that syllabus for “English for Academic Purposes II” which is taught in second semester of the first year contents “ethics” and “ethical considerations “in its indicative content under as topic “composing various arguments”. On the other hand “Principles of Management” module taught in first semester of year three has a sub-topic under its introductory topic called “social responsibility and managerial ethics”. The “Corporate Law 1” module which is to be taught in first semester of third year has a learning outcome of ensuring that students are able to “make decisions based on principles of good corporate governance and business ethics”. Its indicative content has “principles of corporate governance and business ethics” as one of the main topics. Furthermore, indicative content of the “Strategic Management” a module to be taught in first semester of fourth year lists “business ethics” as one of the main topics. Finally, one of the intended outcomes of “Auditing and Assurance Services”, a module to be taught in first semester of the fourth year, is for the students to be able to explain how the audit environment affecting the auditor’s ethical behaviour and auditor independence. However, its

indicative content does not have any specific topic expressly mentioning ethics.

All in all, the analysis indicates that the revision achieved significant improvements by facilitating ethics integration at both course and curriculum levels. As a result, ethics is no longer a mere appendage to auditing courses (Wyatt and Gaa, 2004 cited in Shawver, 2006). The curriculum has now a special stand-alone ethics module which according to Salleh and Ahmad (2012) tend to function as a capstone course, where the essence of ethics can be synthesised. On the other hand by embedding ethics in other courses too, provide the students with the awareness of the importance of ethics to every branch of the profession and to the business environment generally.

Improvements to the curriculum still are needed to ensure robust ethics integration. The modules explicitly embedding ethics must be increased. Currently only six (6) out of forty-eight (48) have ethics embedded. According to Albrecht et al. (2006) ethics must be embedded in every taught business course, be it accounting, marketing, finance, strategy or organisational behaviour and effort must be made to force students to face and resolve ethical dilemmas.

V. CONCLUSIONS

As recognised by Ho and Lin (2006), educational institutions have a role to play in increasing the likelihood that students will less likely to end up committing unethical acts; thus, they must make sure that teaching business ethics is an integral part of the curriculum. Thus the study recognises that ensuring that ethical propriety is entrenched in the student and that they are able to carry it over to the work practice needs serious effort by educators, professional bodies and students themselves. According to Ho and Lin (2006) it might be impractical to expect business ethics courses can significantly change students’ moral will and ethical behaviour. In other words mere integration ethics in accounting curriculum is not a magic button to all ethical challenges. Ho and Lin (2006) posited that “to make business ethics education more effective, ethics courses should act the role of guiding students and fostering students’ ability to deal with ethical issues which they will face somehow in their business careers”. Accounting educators therefore need to do their honest part in teaching future business professionals the importance of ethical development (Albrecht et al., 2006).

The study has endeavoured to analyse the Malawian public accounting educational curriculums in order to assess the integration of ethics. A comparative analysis between the old and revised curriculums was made in order to examine the impact of the revisions with regard to ethics integration. The analysis revealed notable improvements at curriculum level only with

regard to the certificate and diploma curriculums. On the other hand the degree level curriculum was improved both at curriculum and course levels. The study noted the need for continuous improvements to strengthen ethics education and to ensure that it remains relevant.

Generally the study has highlighted the current status of ethics integration in the public accountancy education in Malawi and areas that need improvements. The study serves as a reference for future studies. On the other hand, the study had the following limitations. It was focused only on the curriculums developed by Malawian statutory-established institutions hence may not be generalizable to other private institutions. Future studies may consider extending the sample to include private institutions in order to have a comprehensive picture of Malawi generally. The other limitation relate to the fact that the study only evaluated the quantity of integration, future studies may consider evaluate the quality of ethics integration including teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Finally, the subject is ethics is developing as such there seem to absence of a standard curriculum and techniques to assist in making comparisons. Thus future study may also consider developing assessment standard and techniques.

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