

**APPROACHES USED BY SCHOOL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES TO REDUCE
SCHOOL DROP OUT IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MZIMBA SOUTH
EDUCATION DISTRICT**

MSC THESIS (TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

TINA MKOKOTA BANDA

MZUZU UNIVERSITY

FEBRUARY 2024

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**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN
TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, MZUZU UNIVERSITY,
DEPARTMENT OF AGRISCIENCES, FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES**

MZUZU UNIVERSITY

FEBRUARY 2024

DECLARATION

I declare that this study on “Approaches used by school governance structures in reducing school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District” has been solely authored by me, Tina Banda through the research work that was conducted. Work other than mine has been acknowledged throughout the paper. This work is being submitted as a fulfilment of the award of the degree of Master of Science, Transformative Community Development at Mzuzu University. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

Tina Banda

(MSc. Student)

Signature:



Date:

16/02/2024

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I, the undersigned, certify that this thesis is a result of the author's work and that to the best of my knowledge, it has not been submitted for any other academic qualification within the Mzuzu University or elsewhere. The thesis is acceptable in form and content, and that satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate through an oral examination held on Date 16 February, 2024

Supervisor: 

Date: 19/06/2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my beautiful and loving mother Racheal Phiri, my caring husband Lovemore Kutani, my adorable kids Favour, Racheal and Ethan Kutani, my niece Angella and my father, Hastings Banda. You are the best support system.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ELO	Expanded Learning Opportunities
FAWEMA	Forum for African Women Educationists
FDGs	Focus Group Discussions
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MG	Mother Group
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SGS	School Governance Structures
SMC	School Management Committee
SBM	School Based Management
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Right
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

ABSTRACT

This study explores approaches used by school governance structures in reducing school drop out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District. Specifically, the study sought to establish factors leading to school drop-out, to explore roles of each school governance structure, to assess the current approaches used by these structures to tackle school drop-out and to identify gaps that exist in the approaches used. The study used a qualitative approach to have an in depth understanding of why learners are not retained in school. Purposive, snowball and convenient sampling were key sampling techniques used. The study employed Grounded Theory during data collection and Systems Theory guided the analysis. The study established that learners drop out due to lack of parental care, poverty, class repetition and peer pressure and that roles that directly relate to reducing school drop-out were executed by Mother Group. The main approaches used by SGS included provision of guidance and counselling on importance of school, menstrual hygiene, and reporting abuse; and bringing learners that dropped out back to school. Gaps identified in SGS programming included lack of coordination between parents and school authorities, inadequate engagement with at risk learners and lack of school-based counsellors to provide psychosocial support to learners. The study recommends that Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should enforce the implementation of Grade Promotion Policy to minimise grade repetition. The study also recommends capacity building of mother groups to include training them on psychosocial counselling, enhanced learner engagement and good coordination between the school and school governance structures in identifying and assisting learners at risk of dropping out. Lastly, the study recommends making education fun and introduction of after school clubs that would help promote school retention. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the functionality of SGS as they work to reduce school drop-out.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Background

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. “Lack of education is both a part of the definition of poverty and a means for its diminution” (Lewin, 2007, p.2). Goal number 4 of Sustainable Development Goals ‘quality education’ indicates the need that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. However, the Global Education Monitoring Report and UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021) estimated that 244 million children and youth between 6 and 18 worldwide were out of school in 2021, of which 118.5 million were female and 125.5 were male. The report indicates that even before COVID 19, progress in reducing school drop-out was minimal.

The Government of Malawi appreciates the need to provide education to all children. To achieve this, free primary education was introduced in 1994 to increase access to basic education in the country, eliminate inequalities in participation through reducing direct costs, to improve the retention rate and reduce illiteracy. The initiative increased school enrolment significantly and partly responded to the priority area for education in Malawi, which is to provide quality, accessible, and equitable basic education (National Education Policy 2013; Chimombo, 1999).

The Malawi government education system also decentralised the education system and facilitated the establishment of school governance structures such as school management committees and Parents and Teachers Association, to ensure both, retention of learners and administration of quality education at school level. To guide the decentralization, the guidelines for the Management of Education in Malawi (2008), directed that District Assemblies will ensure sound school management involving Head Teachers, Parents Teachers Association and School Management Committees.

The Malawi Education Act (2013) states that each school is mandated to have School Management Committee (SMC), composed of community members. The functions of the School Management Committees should be to meet regularly, to address school issues such as infrastructure, teacher performance, teacher discipline, quality of teaching and absenteeism, as they affect the day to-day

running of the school. In addition, The Government of Malawi (2008) in its guidelines for the management of education functions devolved to district assemblies recommends that every school should have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) made up of parents and teachers together with community leaders. These would typically meet three or four times a year to mobilise communities and hold the School Management Committee accountable. The Malawi National Education Act (2013) clearly explains the functions of school management committee which include: To assist in certain aspects of management and to advise a local government authority on any matter the committee deems appropriate; To observe the attendance and punctuality of teachers and students, and advise the proprietor on the times at which the school session shall begin and end on any day; To advise the proprietor on the appointment, supervision and dismissal of any non-teaching staff; To advise the proprietor on the appointment, resignation or dismissal of any teacher from the school; To satisfy itself as to the maintenance of the school fabric and the provision of school furniture and equipment to the standards approved by a competent authority; To satisfy itself as to the implementation of reports by inspecting officers, where the reports relate to any matter mentioned in this subsection

The School Governance Committees are mandated to act in line with the above-mentioned duties, one of which is to observe attendance and punctuality of teachers and learners. This is where learners who mostly come late to school or are frequently absent can be spotted. Chronic absenteeism is a leading warning that a student will drop out (Bannett, 2019). Despite having structures that investigate affairs of the school on access and quality of education, the number of children dropping out continue being registered at an alarming rate. The 2022 Malawi Education Statistics data indicate that drop-out rate is at 4.7%, while school retention is as low as 24%. This study explored approaches used by the school governance structures to reduce school drop-out in primary schools.

1.1.2 Problem Statement

This section presents the problem that the study attempted to address. It presents the research gap that prompted the researcher to conduct this study in Malawi and the magnitude of the drop-out problem in Malawi and Mzimba Education District. It also explains what is known about school governance structures, thus their roles and approaches in addressing school drop-out.

The School Governance Structures which in other literature are called School Based Management system (SBM) are considered effective for improving enrolment, reducing drop-out rates and repetition, raising the quality of education by motivating teachers and, as a result, improving students' learning outcomes (AusAID, 2011:3). However, much as several studies showed that SBMs led to a reduction in the repetition and failure rates, they also indicated that reducing drop-out rates is done to a lesser degree (Gertler et al. 2006; Jimenes & Sawada, 2003). It has been argued however, that dependability on such results have been rated poor because the number of cases studied is small compared to the scale of the reforms to introduce SBMs across the world (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009:11) and results are not sufficiently consistent to confirm the SBM hypotheses (Carney, Bista & Agergaard, 2007: 612; Malen, Ogawa, & Krans, 1990:289; Sejda, 2004:213. This study will, therefore, add to the body of literature on how SBM contribute to the reduction of school drop-out by exploring their roles and approaches that they use to address the school drop-out problem.

According to 2022 Education Statistics report, Malawi registered a high school drop-out proportion of 4.7% while Mzimba registered 3.6%. The problem of school drop - out in primary school heavily affects completion rate. The 2021 Malawi Annual Report by UNICEF shows that only 33% of primary school learners complete their education. The situation is reported worse in rural areas where only 11% complete primary school as compared to urban areas where 67% complete primary school. This occurs despite having School Governance structures that are mandated to oversee such issues.

The school governance structures are widely recognised in Malawi as part of the innovative way of improving education. The three structures: the School Management Committee (SMC), the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and the Mother Group have diversified roles, all aiming at increasing access to education, learner retention and quality education (Malawi Education Act, 2013). The school management committee has a role of uniting teachers and the community,

encouraging parents to send their children to school every day, supervising school activities, attending to complaints from teachers, parents, and learners, mobilising resources for the school and repairing/maintaining school infrastructures, as well as reporting major repairs to the District Education Manager (The National Training Programme in Headship, 2004). Mother groups in Malawi were initiated by Forum for African Women Educationist in Malawi (FAWEMA) with the goal of taking a leading responsibility in girls' education and one of their crucial objectives is to ensure enrolment, retention, and completion of education by girls (Mother Group Manual, n.d). The roles of mother groups include; sensitising parents to support school going children, providing counselling to, in and out of school children with focus on girls, initiating school feeding programme, assisting needy children with personal needs, identifying and bringing to school special needs children and orphans, reporting abuse and sexual harassment, and ensuring discipline, conducting income generating activities to support girls education, ensuring availability of sanitary facilities and returning drop outs to school. On the other hand, the PTA is the main school link between parents and teachers. It is also responsible for handling some students' concerns (Mother Group Training Manual, n.d).

The problem of school drop-out cannot be pointed to one causative factor as it is influenced by a range of interacting factors that are specific to individual contexts of a child. It therefore, needs to be viewed as a process rather than an event (Russel, 2001). However, the issue of school drop-out can be understood well from the communities where they occur. This is the reason why the study focused on tackling drop- out by exploring the causes, roles of school governance structures and approaches that they employ in minimising the problem. The local governance structures stand a better chance of knowing the causes of learner drop-outs in their community and can devise ways of dealing with the problem either on their own as a community, in case the drop -out is a result of cultural or social economic activities within the community, or they can engage other actors on factors that are beyond their capacity and control.

Malawi Education Sector Analysis (2019) discusses that Malawi decentralised its education sector to emphasise on community involvement and participation in school management. The document further states that many studies have confirmed that Malawian communities do participate in school-based governance when given the opportunity; but it is less clear that this decision-making aspect of participation improves schooling. This prompted the study to explore the approaches that

school governance committees use to minimise school drop-out which is one of the goals of education (Universal Access to Education). The study will discuss if the approaches relate to the causes and if there are some gaps that when addressed will make the structures work perfectly and efficiently in reducing school drop - out.

The principle for primary education is clear in some ways: The Ministry is responsible for policy and quality assurance while districts and communities are responsible for operations. The key figures at district and community levels are the DEM, and the PEA and the Head Teacher, respectively, with the MoEST and District Councils overseeing those activities (Malawi Education Sector Analysis, 2019).

Despite the presence of educational governance structures, schools in Malawi register high drop-out rates and this suggests that either some approaches worthy employing are missing or misplaced, or that there is a missing link within or outside these structures for Malawi to win the battle against school drop-out. The Mother Group, PTA and SMC have been tasked to ensure school completion which can never be achieved if drop out is still high (Malawi Education Act, 2013). This study will review the approaches being employed by these school governance structures and assess why they are not responding well to keeping learners in school in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District.

The problem of school drop-out challenges the accomplishment of goal number 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2030 which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The goal targets all children and adolescents, especially those hailing from marginalised communities to have access to education. Malawi is among the 193 member states that negotiated these sustainable development goals and agreed to adopt them.

1.2. Study Objectives

1.2.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to explore the approaches used by school governance structures in addressing school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study aimed to:

- Establish factors that lead to high school drop-outs among learners in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District.
- Explore the extent to which school governance structures play their role in reducing school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District.
- Assess approaches used by school governance structures to address school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District.
- Identify gaps in the approaches used by the school governance structures to reduce school drop-outs.

1.2.3 Research Questions

General research question:

The critical question guiding this study was ‘What approaches are used by school governance structures in addressing school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District?’

Specific research questions:

Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

- a. What factors led to high school drop-out among learners in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District?
- b. To what extent do school governance structures play their role in reducing school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District?
- c. What approaches do school governance structures use to address school drop-out?
- d. What are the gaps in the current approaches used by school governance structures in addressing school drop out?

1.3 Justification of the study

Reducing school drop-out implies increasing school retention and enabling every child to exercise his/her right to education. Addressing school drop-out is therefore very crucial if the country is to equip its citizens with quality education. Having an education qualification and working as a social worker, the researcher realised that there is a gap in how the education system operates to retain learners in school as evidenced by high drop-out rates, especially in rural areas. The structures available in these schools (PTA, SMC, and Mother group) are key to deal with the problem of school drop-out but the increased numbers of the same suggest a miss in how they approach the problem if at all they approach it. This research dug into what causes drop out and what these school governance structures do in relation to reducing it.

The results of this study provide guidance to policy makers to realise the gaps that exist in the decentralised system of school governance. With guidance from study results and borrowing from approaches used in other countries reviewed in the study's literature review section, policy developers need to revise the training materials for SGSs to equip school governance structures on how they can systematically tackle barriers leading to school drop-out.

The available literature on the role and approaches used by school governance structures in reducing drop-out as well as improving the quality of education is scanty in Malawi, as compared to other countries like America and India. Due to scarcity of studies on how School Governance Structures contribute to drop-out reduction, (Gertler et al., 2006) confirms that it is difficult to validate studies that established failure of SMCs to significantly reduce school drop-out. This study therefore, adds value to the body of knowledge in this area in the context of Malawi.

Achieving significant reduction in drop-out rates, requires well strategised approaches by the school governance structures which are a sustainable tool for bringing the desired change because they know the root causes and solutions. After a critical analysis of the approaches currently in use, the findings of the study act as a guide to Mother groups, School Management Committee and Parents and Teachers' Association on the holistic and most probable successful approaches of reducing school drop-out.

Apart from the government interventions aiming at reducing school drop-out, Non-Governmental Organisations also joined the battle and mostly targeted school structures like mother groups. For the effectiveness of their programmes, they need to develop approaches that address main reasons

for school drop - out with triangulated data. This study has revealed that consulting school governance structures alone can be misleading as some of the causes of drop- out that they gave was assumptive. As such some interventions brought by NGOs were not sufficient.

The relevance of the study cannot be overemphasised as there are numerous gains that a country with minimal school drop-out rate realises. The rate of crime reduces as most citizens in the country get involved in either white collar jobs or have basic skills to be entrepreneurs and excel in life. In the absence of the two factors above, people resort to crooked and destructive ways of making ends meet. Youths who drop-out of school have higher rates of offending as compared to non-drop-outs (Sweeten, 2004). All the mentioned gains are lost when drop-out is high.

In summary, the study informs policy holders to make decisions on how to capacitate local structures to enable them function effectively. It also points to some policies that need to be enforced such as grade promotion policy. The study also provides guidance to school governance structures to conduct clear cause and effect analysis on factors leading to school drop out in their contexts to make sure their interventions are tailor made.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews what other researchers discovered as factors leading to school drop-out both in Malawi and in other countries. These have been classified into individual and institutional factors. Strategies that other school institutions ever employed to reduce school drop-out have been explained. This section also presents what the school governance structures in other countries including Malawi are doing to address the problem.

2.1. Causes of School Drop-out

The problem of school drop-out has been attributed to several causes, some of which are individual, while others are institutional. Individual factors consist of student background, attitudes, and behaviours, while institutional factors are composed of families, schools, and communities.

2.1.1. Individual factors

2.1.1.1 Poverty

The most cited individual factor is poverty, which prevents learners from having school necessities and forces them to find piece work to make ends meet. In cases of acute poverty, finding food becomes a priority other than meeting educational needs. In a study conducted in East and Southern Africa including Malawi, it was established that the need to earn money to meet their needs is the main reason why learners drop - out, followed by unplanned pregnancies, lack of motivation to stay in school and demands for household chores and farm work (The Forum for African Women Educationists, 2000). It is difficult, for instance, for a hungry learner to concentrate in class when he or she has not eaten and is unsure of what the next day would bring. A study done in Chiradzulu, Malawi, on causes of drop-out found that food insecurity was one major problem causing school drop-out as 92% of drop-outs went to school without breakfast (Naunje, 2004).

2.1.1.2 Learners negative attitude towards teachers

Another reason for school drop-out is learners' negative attitude towards their teachers which counted for 38% in the study done by Naunje (2004). The most hated teachers were those that

scorned them and used authoritarian leadership. The study found out that 70% of drop-outs cited punishment by such teachers as one thing they found unfavourable about school.

2.1.1.3 Lack of internal locus control

Drop-outs are also associated with lack of internal locus control (The belief that ‘I am responsible for the incentives/successes I have and the failure I experience) and self-esteem (Nowicki, 2004). In other words, learners that perceive their failure because of external forces can easily drop - out than those that own their weaknesses and strengths.

2.1.1.4 Social causes

Smink and Reimer (n.d) identified other causes being learning disability or emotional disturbance, high number of work hours which prevent learners from concentrating on schoolwork, highly socially active outside of school, poor attendance, low educational expectations, low self-esteem, lack of effort, low commitment to school, no extracurricular participation and early aggression.

2.1.2. Institutional causes

2.1.2.1 Low social economic status

Institutional causes for drop-out include low socio-economic status, low parental education level, high family mobility, number of siblings, family disruption, having a family member who had dropped out, low parental expectations for educational attainment, lack of parental involvement with the school and few conversations with parents about school. Learners who also felt that school administration and teachers did not encourage or give them moral support easily dropped-out (Smink & Reimer, n.d).

2.1.2.2 Lack of learner engagement

The After-School Organisation (2013) explains that the learners decide to stay in school or drop out depending on their engagement. Disengagement often begins as early as elementary school and persist through the higher grades. Indicators of disengagement include high absenteeism, behaviour problems such as being a member of a high-risk social group that engages in risk behaviours and course failure, including both incomplete assignments and failed courses.

2.1.2.3 Grade retention

Grade retention was another reason that greatly led to school drop-out. Roderick (1994) conducted a study on the relationship between grade retention and school drop-out with data collected from school transcript information on youths who comprised the Fall River, Massachusetts, Public School's Seventh Grade (class) of 1980-1981. The results were that 80% of those who repeated a grade dropped out of school. Retention makes students overage for grade and results into substantial disengagement during middle school. Youths who are older than their classmates - either because they were retained, entered school late, or were placed below their modal grade level when they entered the school system may feel different than their peers and may feel discouraged. Being overage for grade may become particularly important during adolescence when students are more responsive to the views of their peers and are forming a sense of identity and school attachment based in part on their assessment of their relative status. These learners perform more poorly in school or have lower self-esteem because of that retention.

2.1.2.4 Abstract learning

Failure to make learning relevant and real is another institutional reason for drop-out. The education system of Malawi has failed to provide learners with learning that is relevant to the local needs, adaptable to local conditions and address the cultural obstacles. In a study done by Chimombo (1999) in Nkhata-Bay, Salima and Lilongwe, the local people of Nkhata-Bay and Salima felt that the curriculum could have included things like fishing. Culture like early marriage, needed to be tactfully covered in school to reduce it as it is one of the reasons leading to school drop-out.

2.1.2.5 The learning environment

The study conducted by Gondwe (2016) in Nkhata-Bay south revealed that overcrowded classroom and teacher's absenteeism were some of the causes of school drop-out. Learners get demotivated when they spend more time unattended to because of the teacher's absence from work. The overcrowded classrooms also make some learners dislike school and eventually drop - out. The study also revealed teenage pregnancies and child marriages as other factors leading to school drop-out.

The abovementioned study results relate to the Education Management Information System's data as presented in the Malawi Education statistics (2022) which listed poverty, family responsibilities, child marriages, teenage pregnancies, poor facility among other reasons. This shows that most Malawian communities have similar characteristics.

A scientific study on causes of school drop-out has never been conducted in the selected areas of this study where school drop-out is also high. This study, therefore, unearthed contextual causes of the problem and suggested solutions.

2.2. Roles of school governance committees

According to the National Education Standards (2015), PTA is tasked to regularly communicate with parents and the community about its activities, challenges, and achievements. The PTA members are expected to know their roles and responsibilities and attend meetings regularly. Similarly, the Mothers' Group is supposed to be aware of its roles and responsibilities and visit the school regularly to support girls in their learning. Through these structures, parents should show a high level of interest in their children's education, safety, and care. Parents receive feedback on their children's progress and practical advice on how they can support their learning and keep them in school. The school through PTA, communicates its expectations of students' achievement, attendance, completion, and behaviour to parents. These education standards stipulate integration of parts of the school governance that the study assessed, which is one key element that systems theory advocates for the effectiveness of any system. The school among its key activities done through its headteachers, (who are also part of school governance structures), is to communicate the schools' goals to the community, which includes students' achievement, attendance, completion, and behaviour to parents. This entails systems boundary which recommends flow of data from one system to another. Any functional system that displays these characteristics is bound to succeed. It is feedback that informs decision making and effectiveness if worked upon.

2.3. Strategies for reducing school drop-out.

Whilst it is important to address all causes of school drop-out, it is argued that there are some factors that affect high school completion that educators can change and there are some that they cannot change. It is paramount therefore, to know what they are and how to handle them. Factors that the school has no control over include gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Wells,

2008). Intervention strategies to mitigate the drop-out problem at community level call for input from all four constituents involved in the drop-out process which include individual, family, school, and community.

In a study done in the American High Schools by Hahn, et al. (1987), strategies for reducing school drop-out were discussed and included training and provision of guidance counsellors which could be set up with potential drop outs, providing a restructuring of the role of a truant officer to provide more effective coordination of efforts between home, school, and the community, making available SRH service providers, and improved incentives for staying in school. The key resolution to the study was that the most important thing to consider in reducing drop-out is giving attention to individual students' problems, and not just academic problems. After introducing the above approaches, drop-out significantly dropped. Freudenberg (2007) indicates that interventions that have potential to improve school drop-out are those aiming at improving the health of students which include health clinics, mental health programmes, substance abuse prevention and treatment programmes, comprehensive sex education, HIV prevention, pregnancy prevention, violence prevention programmes and community-based programmes. In other words, literature indicates that focus on improving academic performance without connecting to learners' personal lives creates challenges to retain learners in school.

A greater investment in afterschool programmes would help bring the much-needed services and support to communities, schools, families, and students that are at risk of dropping out (Lynch, 2016). The strategy aims at enforcing academic rigour, boost student engagement, and provide students with supportive relationships. Hann et al. (1987) further states that High-quality learning outside school can also help to combat the effects of poverty on students' academic achievement by providing programmes and services including tutoring, homework help, life skills, and enrichment opportunities in music, sports, and the arts. Through the programme, the likely drop-outs are identified and provided with targeted intervention. In middle and high schools across the Georgia State, graduation coaches identify at-risk students and connect them with Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) and other services that keep them on track to graduate while Massachusetts does this through a state-level investment in afterschool programmes and by extending the school day and year in low-performing schools to ensure that at-risk students have access to learning opportunities beyond the regular school day. They also establish statewide

systems to ensure ELOs are effective and are tied to drop-out reduction goals (Harris, 2009). The ELO also encourages support rigour in the classroom, increasing the relevance of academic content to students and establishing supportive relationships between students and caring adults. This was reported to have reduced drop-out of the at-risk group. An observation was made that schools and communities lack the capacity to identify and target students at risk of dropping- out. At risk youth often lack access to these out of school learning sessions. Literature reveals that some States often fail to ensure that ELOs are effective and focused on drop-out prevention. Most States have no early warning data systems or staff in place to identify students using this information.

Even when schools can identify at-risk students, they may lack the capacity to target effective assistance to them because these students face many challenges outside the school doors. For example, most schools are unequipped to provide the necessary health and social services, such as individual counselors and healthy meals that can help ensure that at-risk students are mentally and physically prepared to learn. At-risk students who do not receive the needed interventions through ELOs and other supports, face a greater risk of dropping-out over time. The need to increase access to ELOs and improving their effectiveness can therefore not be overemphasised. ELOs give students extra time, help, and the instruction they need to meet the demands of their academic coursework in reading, mathematics, and other subjects. For example, a study of high quality ELOs found that the average Math score for programme participants was higher than that of 70 percent of their peers who did not participate.

The Drop-out Prevention Network Centre (n.d) listed interventions that reduce school drop-outs which are: systemic school renewal, school-community collaboration, safe learning environments, family engagement, early childhood education, mentoring, service learning, individualised instruction, and career and technology education. Rigorous studies on the efficacy and effectiveness of afterschool programmes have proven that afterschool programmes work to help improve educational outcomes and mitigate drop-out rates.

Smink and Reimer (n.d) commended three interactional interventions that build on each other, namely: (1) a strategy targeting all parents, (2) an assessment to identify high-risk families, and (3) provision of professional support to identified high-risk families. The main activities included videotape examples and newsletters disseminated through the Family Resource Center, Family Goals established at the beginning of the programme, Weekly Parent Meetings for discussion and

practice, Parent Consultants, Individual Family Meetings and Weekly Phone Contacts with each family. The evaluation that Smink and Reimer (n.d) conducted concluded that putting high risk youths together into groups for the Teen Focus curriculum resulted in escalation of problem behaviours; therefore, this activity was excluded from the interventions of reducing drop - out. This implies that establishing special groups for at - risk learners is not ideal. Rather, most programmes should be inclusive and focus on individuals.

Several approaches have been used and documented from other countries as regards reducing school drop-out. These were implemented by school governing bodies. There is scanty literature on what school governance structures are doing to address the problem in Malawi, hence the study aims to add to the body of literature on the operations of these structures in Malawi. As articulated by Systems Theory, the study does not imply that there is something wrong or something is wrongly done by these structures, but there is need to understand how they work towards improving access to education by reducing school drop-out and offer recommendations based on the identified gaps. The zeal to conduct the empirical study rose from the continued challenge of school drop-outs regardless of the existing structures. As presented in the UNICEF report (2021), primary school completion rate was at 33% only, meaning that 67% of the learners are unable to complete their primary school education.

Most studies in Malawi have focused on improving the quality of education where things like provision of adequate resources, analysis of the curriculum, assessing teaching methodologies and policy frameworks have been discussed. For instance, a study by Altinyelken (2021) focused on improving educational quality through active learning from the perspective of teachers in Malawi. Barnett (2018) conducted a study on education quality in Malawi while examining the role of decentralisation. Kunje, Chimombo and Ogawa (2015) researched Universal Primary Education and the quality of Education in 2015. There has been less focus on understanding the significance of the roles of and strategies used by school governance structures to ensure that all children access quality primary education for all the recommended 8 years.

From the literature reviewed, the study concludes that varying factors of school drop-out, be it individual or institutional, can mainly be tackled by School Governance Structures, also referred to as School Based Management Systems. A strong SGS can increasingly minimise school drop-

out. Key approaches used include behavioural change interventions with much focus on learner engagement and involvement of parents and counsellors.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by systems theory which was founded by a biologist named L. von Bertalanffy in the 1930s as a modeling device that accommodates the interrelationships and overlap between separate disciplines. According to Mele and Polese (2010), the theory articulates that problems cannot be successfully solved if interrelated components can be studied separately. Mainly, the theory brings about the beauty of integration of parts of the problem. Studies using systems analysis and design take the viewpoint that the problem does not mean that there is something wrong, but rather that there is a situation that needs to be understood and solutions to be found.

A system is defined as a set of isolated components that work together in a particular environment to perform whatever functions are required to achieve the systems' objectives. By definition, a system is goal oriented and that is the main reason for its existence. Any system has common characteristics including Input, output (the success of a system is determined by how its outputs work to attain its goal). Feedback, a system depends on feedback, if it receives negative feedback, it should be able to adjust its input or processes to improve input. Entropy, which measures the degree of disorder in the system to monitor whether the available outputs are correct. The system also operates in its internal environment on which it has control, but also in the external environment which the system has no control over, much as it has impact on it. Each system has subsystems which are self-contained and interrelated. This is one of the most crucial aspects since the existing interdependency of subsystems aid in developing a complete system. A system also allows the flow of data from one system to another, which is known as system boundary. Overall, a system depends on interdependency as they rarely operate in isolation (Mele & Polese, 2010).

Education in Malawi also works as a system. It involves different components that aim at achieving one goal, thus, to make quality education accessible to every child. The subsystems of primary education in Malawi include the Ministry, the District Education Offices, the School Administration, the School governance structures, parents, communities, church, and other agents of socialisation. With the decentralised education system, more powers on day to day running of

schools have been vested in school governance structures, which are SMC, PTA, and Mother Group of which the headteacher is a member in all these committees.

The Education Policy of Malawi differentiated roles of these sub systems. For instance, the Central Authority (Ministry) is responsible for setting policy and standards. Their other duties include regulation, monitoring, inspection and evaluation of National projects, Human resources (hiring, firing, promotions, and transfers), payroll, capital investment, expenditure (including contracting and procurement). Teaching/learning materials (e.g., textbooks) and Management of donor funds. The Local Authority which includes the council and district education offices are responsible for planning (participatory) and budgeting, Monitoring examinations, Teacher loans (including secondary) and allowances while other organisations including SMC and PTA's functions relate to school (fundraising, budget, expenditure, civic education, oversight, etc.), while school administration looks at day to day running of school. On the other hand, the community, teachers, church, and peers form yet another sub-section crucial to providing input and feedback to the system (Government of Malawi, 2008).

Using systems theory, this study explored the roles of school governance structures as one key sub-sector of the education system and how they operate in their internal environment in which they have much control over, to promote access to quality education. The study further discussed the interrelationships that exist between school governance structures themselves and other stakeholders such as parents, learners/drop out themselves and the community at large through the examination of approaches used to address school drop-out.

Learning from roles of each subsystem above, it translates that each section is related to the other to achieve accessible quality education. For example, the policies that the ministry plans, and the standards set are put into the plans of the local authority such as the DEM. The school administration (head-teacher and staff) put these plans into practice while the school governance committees (SMC, PTA, Mother Group) civic educate parents on their support, fund-raise for some activities, and manage school funds to bring about the desired change in the running of schools. In all the plans, standards, implementation, and involvement of the community done by different subsystems, the aim is largely one, thus, to increase access to and quality of education. If learners drop -out, then access to quality education is compromised and this means the system's main goal has been defeated. The study analysed how the school government structures relate to

other sub-systems in its approaches to reduce school drop-out. The gaps that were discovered will help policy makers to strengthen the sub-systems in the education sector.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section explains research designs and methodology that were employed in the study and accounts for reasons why they were used. The chapter further discusses the research paradigm that guided the study, the study's target population, sampling techniques, research instruments, data collection methods and how data was analysed.

3.1. Study Design

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:22), a research design is a general plan that describes how the research study is conducted. The design allows the researcher to study a programme, an event, activity, or process in-depth to fully understand it (Creswell, 2009). This study employed a qualitative research design. Mcleod (2023) indicates that qualitative research aims at producing rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied and uncover new insights and meanings. The design mainly answers the question 'why' and 'how'. In other words, the focus is not on numbers, but exploring the how and why things are the way they are.

In this study, the emphasis was on how school governance structures operate to tackle the issue of drop-outs and if their functions are enough to reduce school drop-out. The research also explored why learners drop out in the study area.

Qualitative research design allows participants in the study to take part in open ended interviews during which the researcher can establish the causes as well as the solutions to the research problem (Henning, 2004:5). The method was also chosen because there was more to learn about the roles and strategies that Mother Groups, PTA and School Management Committee play and use respectively, to retain learners at school, hence the need to capture detailed viewpoints of the members of these structures, learners themselves and school drop-outs.

Grounded Theory was used during data collection and analysis. According to Tarell, this approach aims at developing a theory for a single phenomenon of living that is shared by others (Charmaz, 2014). The theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Straus, sociologists who felt that the existing studies have been overused in research and they wanted to create room for the emergence of new theories. Mainly, the new theory is developed from the data that the researcher collects. It is a research tool which enables one to seek and conceptualise the latent social patterns and

structures of your area of interest through the process of constant comparison. The theory starts with inductive approach to generate substantive codes from data, later the theory is developed which suggests where to go next to collect data, and which more focused questions to ask. It gives an explanation about the main concern of the population of the substantive area and how the concern is resolved or processed. In summary, Grounded Theory is the study of a concept or core category (Scott, 2009). In Grounded Theory, the researcher acts like a witness, takes detailed notes of proceedings and questions participants to better understand what they are doing and why. Grounded theorists are interested in the way human actors negotiate and manage social situations and how their actions contribute to the unfolding of social processes. The researcher constructs a particular understanding of a phenomenon under investigation, it is a construction of reality.

During data collection for the study, the researcher allowed a free flow of participants' conversations to gather more information about issues surrounding the drop-out situation. The study relied on such conversations to build more probing questions. This provided a detailed bank of ideas that guided the formation of codes that were later classified into themes for data analysis.

A Grounded Theory illustrates how school governance structures were supposed to work. The theory shows who is supposed to do what among the three structures and the kind of approaches that needed to be applied by these structures in the targeted study area.

3.2 The study paradigm

The term paradigm in educational research refers to the researchers' world view, where world view refers to the school of thought or a shared belief that guides the interpretation of the research data. It is the researchers' thinking that guides the study and its analysis of results (Kivunga, 2017).

This research study was guided by the Social Constructivism World View. This paradigm holds a belief that reality is constructed through human interaction with their environment and considers knowledge as a human product which is socially and culturally constructed. Social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context in the process of knowledge construction and accumulation. It is in the understanding of the researcher of this study that the issue of school drop-out should be explored from the environment in which it occurs. The functionality of School Governance Structures was understood from the perspective of how they relate with learners, drop-

outs and other concerned structures within their context. The study therefore, explored school structural functioning in relation to promoting access to education.

The aim of constructivist research therefore, is to understand situations or phenomena. This considers the involvement of different groups that interact to solve problems of a target group. As such, this world view believes in multiple rather than single truths of a situation or phenomena. After the collection of rich data, the researcher creates ideas about the subject studied (iNtgrty, 2016). The involvement of school drop-outs themselves, their peers who are still in school, the headteachers and members of the school governance structure provided a wide range of truths from which conclusions were made about the subject being studied.

Creswell (2009) states that social constructivism understands individuals as developers of subjective meanings of their environment and using this worldview, the goal of research is to rely much on how participants view the situation that is being studied. Above all, constructivist researchers focus on interactions or relationships among people within the context that they live in. Using this viewpoint, theory is never considered as the starting point of research, but what is encouraged is theory generation after conducting the study. This study generated a theory from the collected data. The research guided by this paradigm takes into consideration the cultural, historical, and personal perspectives of the subjects. The study also appreciated the situation of school drop-out in the context of selected schools from Mzimba South Education District and the experiences drop-outs themselves regard as factors that influenced their decision to drop-out of school. Both personal and cultural perspectives were analysed.

3.3. Study location

The study was carried out in selected primary schools from Mzimba South Education catchment area, specifically from Luwerezi, Kaphuta and Chasato educational zones. Luwerezi zone has 15 schools and a total learner population of 7029. It is located to the Southeast of Mzimba, 15 km from the M1 road which passes through Luwerezi forest. Chasato is located to the north-east of Mzimba and Kaphuta zone is at the centre (boma) of Mzimba district. These three areas were chosen because of their increasing number of primary schools' drop-outs. During one of the stakeholders' review meetings that the researcher attended in Mzimba, one organisation (CCAP synod of Livingstonia, education department) that implemented keeping Girls in School Project, mentioned that after 3 years of project implementation, school drop-out was still high in these

areas. This motivated the researcher to explore the situation from the lens of school governance structures.



Figure 3. 1: Map showing the study location

3.4. Sampling methods

The research used three non-probability sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to directly target the school governance committees, in-school learners, head teachers and the PEAs to understand their views on causes of drop-out and approaches used to minimise them. This method is suitable for identification of information rich cases and is used where emphasis is on participants (Mertens, 2005).

Snowball sampling was employed whereby one drop out identified another in the area until saturation point was reached. Snowball sampling is a research method which allows participants to recruit their fellow in a study and is suitable where the needed population is hard to find (Stephanie, 2014). In this study, only those that shared classes would now drop-out for 2017/2018 academic year.

The researcher also used convenience sampling. According to Bhardwaj (2019), convenience sampling means selecting the members of a sample because of their convenient accessibility. In this study, schools that were easily accessible by the researcher within the selected zones were selected. The Mzimba South Education Office presented 3 of the zones that had high school drop-out and from the 3, the researcher chose schools that were not hard to reach and collect data from.

3.5. Sample

Akman (2023) defines a sample as a condensed and controllable representation of a larger group. Data collected from the sample represents the study population, hence the need to carefully select the sample. It is recommended that the sample should possess traits of the study population to make sure that the results are a good representation of the study population.

Six schools were chosen and involved in the study. These were Ehlaleni, Echikhangeni, Mchirawengo, Chasato, Matewu and Changuluwe primary schools. However, these schools were drawn from education zones which had high numbers of school drop-outs. From the 6 schools, 6 Mother Groups, 6 School Management Committees and 6 PTAs were drawn to participate in the study. The study also involved 13 drop-outs for the 2017/2018 academic year. The researcher discontinued involving school drop-outs when saturation of data was reached. Data saturation is when new participants do not produce new findings to the study. A total of 60 in school learners (10/school), 6 headteachers and 2 PEAs also participated. The study aimed at establishing what motivates the in-school learners to remain in school and what they think made others to drop-out. Further than that, the study, using the in-school learners, explored whether learners know how structures support them and verify their functionality. The study established vivid root causes of school drop-out from drop-outs themselves and how structures intervened in their situation to prevent or respond to their dropping out. Head teachers and PEAs were providing information on all the study objectives to validate findings from the other three main groups of respondents, thus school governance structures, in school learners and drop-outs.

3.6. Data collection methods

3.6.1. Focus Group Discussions

According to Cornwall & Jewkes (1995, quoted by Yayeh, 2021) in his article ‘Focus Group Discussion as a data collection tool in Economics’ defined Focus group discussion as a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction. This data collection method follows a loosely structured discussion which comprises of six to ten individuals that are used to gather information on a particular research or programme topic facilitated by a professional or an external moderator. The researcher chose to have 10 people per focus group discussion to allow diversity of opinions and depth of data. The more the people, the more the opinions and understanding on issues. Using this technique, a researcher gathers as much data as possible which he/she analyses to find meaning in it.

In this study, the researcher used Focus Group Discussions and analysed the voice recordings gathered, looked for clues and organised them to make sense of them. This method was used on 6 school governance structures and in school learners to get information on factors leading to school drop-out, roles of school governance structure, approaches that school governance structures use to minimise school drop-out and gaps in the approaches used.

3.6.2. Interviews

Interviews in research refer to a basic mode of inquiry with an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth. There are three types of interviews namely structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are where a researcher uses preset questions to ask interviewees and does not deviate from them throughout the interviews. This gives respondents some limitation on the kind of information to give. Unstructured interviews are flexible, no preset questions are used, and the direction of the interviews can be unpredictable. Another type is semi-structured which is a mixture of the two where the questions are pre-planned prior to the interview, but the interviewer gives the interviewee the chance to elaborate and explain issues using open-ended questions. This study used semi-structured interviews with school drop-outs, head-teachers and PEAs to ensure that there is no hinderance on the depth and richness of the responses. Seidman (2012:8-9 as quoted by Alsaawi 2014) in his journal ‘A Critical Review of qualitative Interviews.’

The study conducted 13 in depth interviews with school drop-outs to understand reasons why they did not continue with their primary school education, their knowledge of school governance structures roles and what they think would have saved them from dropping-out. A total of 7 female and 6 male drop-outs participated. The study reached saturation point as no new data was being generated from drop-outs and decided to stop at the 13th interviewee.

A total of 6 interviews were conducted with school heads from the 6 sampled schools and 6 interviews were made with in-school learners. It was relevant to get data from other sources within the sample to ensure data triangulation.

3.7. Data analysis

Data has been analysed using the open coding system. Under this technique, all data sets from interviews and FGD were first transcribed. The transcribed data was coded to produce codes; the codes that developed were grouped to form categories, and the categories were further grouped to form themes. The discussion of results has been done following the developed themes; relating them to the research questions.

3.8. Ethical consideration

Tarell (2016) explains that every research concerning human beings need to follow some ethical principles such as getting informed consent from participants, assessing risks and benefits that the research may impose on participants and selection of subjects. Researchers must establish and follow fair procedures for identifying and selecting participants for a research study. Participants should not be purposefully included or excluded for reasons of risk or reward.

The researcher ensured that she/he explains the purpose of the study to the participants to which participants gave consent of their involvement. An introduction letter from Mzuzu University was obtained which was given to the chiefs, head-teachers and other stakeholders who were involved as evidence of the research mission. The researcher verbally briefed chiefs in whose villages the research took place, on the purpose of the research and consent was obtained before the actual data collection.

The researcher also explained the essence of research to the actual participants and asked for their consent before involving them. Consent forms were issued, and they were asked to sign. The researcher informed participants that their involvement is voluntary, and the information given

will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Emphasis was also made on ensuring strict confidentiality. Their right to withdraw from participating at any stage was also explained.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents findings on the 4 study objectives as articulated by members of school governance structures, head- teachers, in-school learners, and the drop-outs themselves. The study objectives are: to establish factors that lead to high school drop-out among learners in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District, to explore the role of school governance structures in reducing school drop-outs in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District, to assess approaches used by school governance structures to address school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District, and to identify gaps in the approaches used by the school governance structures to reduce school drop-out. This is followed by a presentation of the theory showing correspondence among factors leading to school drop-out, roles and approaches used by school governance structures to handle school drop-outs as developed in the study. This analysis of results follows Systems Theory where the different stakeholders are required to converge to deal with factors of school drop-out with school governance structures as their coordinator.

4.1. Factors leading to school drop-out.

The study established factors that lead to school drop out from the perspectives of 2018/2019 school drop-outs, school governance structures, in-school learners, headteachers and Primary Education Advisors. Four factors were identified as major causes namely lack of parental care, class repetition, poverty, and peer pressure. From a total of 142 respondents involved in the study, 134 identified lack of parental care as a leading cause, 130 explained that learners drop out due to poverty, 77 mentioned class repetition while 70 pointed out to peer pressure as a major cause for school drop-out.

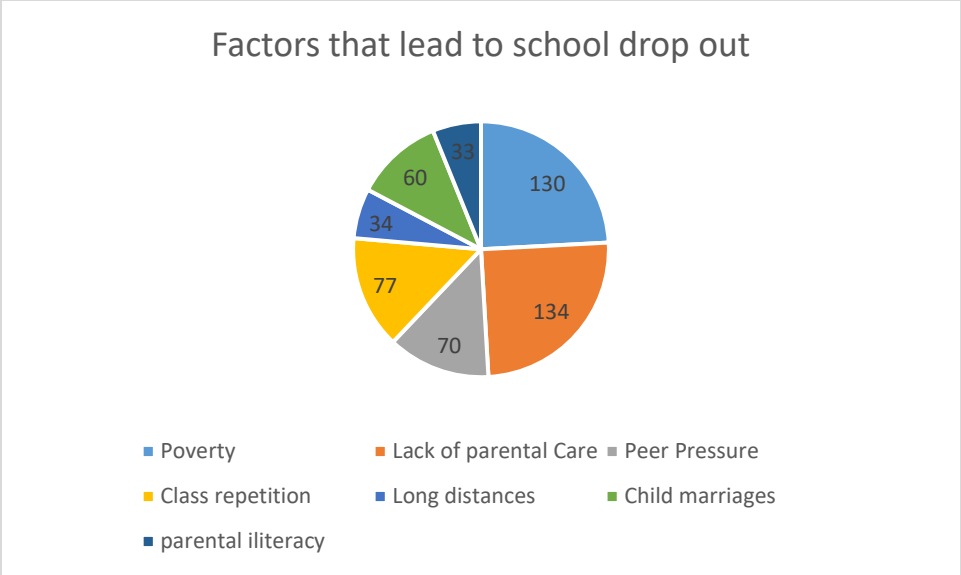


Figure 4. 1: Factors that lead to school dropout

4.1.1 Causes of school drop out from the perspective of drop-outs.

Introduction

An in-depth interview with school drop-outs was conducted. The researcher interviewed each drop-out separately to get as rich information as possible. The respondents’ age ranged from 12 to 18 years and except 1, all dropped out from primary schools. Among the drop-outs, 2 dropped 5 years back while others were fresh drop-outs (2017/2018 academic year). The study interviewed 6 boys and 7 girls, and the following were key causes of school drop-out:

4.1.1.1 Lack of parental care

Children who were not living with their biological parents and had aged guardians were overburdened with household chores and failed to balance with school demands. This was the case with 4 drop-outs; Mary, John, Martha, and Robert that the researcher interviewed. Furthermore, children whose parents failed to provide for their school necessities did not continue with their education. The amount of school requirements for those interviewed was not significant that the parents could not manage but since their parents were less concerned with educational needs, the requirement was not met. This was the case with John whose mother remarried and never cared about him. Similarly, Robert’s parents were unable to take care of his financial needs, and this made him drop-out. His parents wanted him to continue with school, but since the brother who was supporting him was unwilling to continue rendering support, Robert dropped-out.

John said:

‘I dropped out of school because I lacked examination fees which was K900 used for printing examination papers and report card money which was K1200 in 2018. This happened when I was in standard 6,’ said John. John’s father who was the breadwinner died when he was very young. Her mother remarried and stayed in another district. Since the father’s death, John was brought up by grandparents who were failing to meet the requirements.

Mary explained:

“My parents went to South Africa, and I only stay with my elder brother who is 21 years, and my younger sister. So, whenever I knocked off from school, I went straight to cooking and doing other household chores which disturbed me quite a lot. Now, I enjoy and am used to being home because I do not have pressure managing both school and home’. She narrated that her parents directed her brother to deny her food when she does not go to school, but she was not shaken by the directive because she knew they cannot do that. Surely, Mary needed someone to take care of the home while she concentrates on school. From the explanation, it is evident that Mary had less time to rest and socialise This can never be easy for a young girl of 13 years who is required to have time to rest and play as well. Mary explained that the pressure even affected her performance at school, which further decreased her motivation to continue learning.

Jane said:

“I used to wake up early in the morning, draw water from the borehole, sweep the surrounding, cook, and then off to school. After classes, I came home and continued with cooking and other chores. Then I decided to stop school. I stay with my old grandparents who are unable to cook for us. Both of my parents migrated to South Africa where they work and send us help. I do not lack basic needs, but I found it tiresome to continue with school.” In the case of Jane, her parents travelled to South Africa so that they can fend for their family. ‘Tough situations forced my parents to migrate to South Africa to look for greener pasture, we were not able to find the basic needs before my parents travelled’. Poverty is primarily the driving factor for some parents to work in South Africa. The desire to provide for their family increase when they see their fellow who went before them. However, the strategy creates child protection issues as children are left unattended to, unguided and with pressure to balance school life and home management.

Robert Said:

“I did not do well at school and my brother who was meeting my school needs said he will not continue supporting me. Even when my parents asked him to do so, he said he needs to concentrate on my younger brothers who were doing well. My parents could not support me as they also depended on my brother who stays in South Africa”. Basically, Robert’s parents transferred their responsibility to his brother. A follow up chat with them revealed that they could ably manage to buy and pay for Robert’s school necessities with the money his brother sends them, but they no longer felt they should.

Martha said:

“My failure in class was mainly due to overworking at home since I only live with my grandmother who is old. My mother remarried so it is me who fends for the family and do the chores”. Martha felt that her mother does not care about education as she has never asked about it and she was not bothered when she dropped-out.

Jerad:

“I dropped-out to graze my father’s cattle. My father works in town. My elder brother dropped out before me but never showed interest in grazing cattle. I stay with my old grandfather who cannot take up the responsibility”. Surprisingly for Jerad, his father lives at Mzimba town which is not more than 5 km from Matewu. He works there but has no interest in his son’s education.

Guided by Grounded Theory on data collection and analysis, which explains that the nature of conversation directs the researcher on where next to gather data, the study went further to understand the education levels of the parents of the drop-outs that were met. This was to establish an understanding of the relationship between literacy levels of parents and education. It was found that all the parents of the drop-outs met never completed primary school education much as most of them can basically read vernacular language and two of them can speak basic English through their exposure in South Africa where they migrated for greener pasture World Literacy Foundation (2018 as cited by Miranda, 2021) in her article ‘The Economic and Social Cost of Illiteracy’ argues that parents who are functionally illiterate often prioritise work before education, have lower expectations regarding schooling, and the children of parents who fail to complete primary school are more likely to follow in their footsteps and do likewise. This leads to a cycle of disadvantages

through generations. On the other hand, strong literacy skills among parents will have positive impacts on their children's lives as they are more able to help and encourage their children in their schoolwork and communicate with their teachers effectively. The study borrows this understanding where parent's low illiteracy levels contributed to their children's failure to remain in school.

The drop-outs confessed that no parent body asked them why they often absconded classes or reported late for school before they dropped out. They would normally be punished by teachers and yet they faced major challenges at home. According to Systems Theory, this illustrates entropy which refers to the degree of disorder of the system. The teachers together with the SMC were required to intervene in the personal lives of these learners by learning why they presented early signs of dropping out such as absenteeism. The Malawi Education Act (2013) explains that the SMC has a duty to check punctuality and school attendance of both teachers and learners. From there, they would have assigned Mother Group to follow up in their homes for a deeper understanding of their situation. Where necessary, other stakeholders like the Social Welfare Department, would have been involved to intervene on child headed/elderly headed households, and provide psychosocial support where needed. This would have averted the drop-out situation.

4.1.1.2 Class Repetition

Another major factor that led to school drop out in the study area is class repetition. Jere (2006) explains that Class Repetition also known as Grade repetition or retention occurs when students are held in the same grade for an extra year rather than being promoted to a higher grade along with their age-peers. This is viewed as a corrective action for those that failed. It was noted that in other school systems, grade repetition is not permitted, instead the policy for all pupils is "social promotion" whereby all students pass and get promoted to study in the next grade with their peers.

Learners who often repeat classes grow big and become a laughingstock among their friends. They feel out of place learning with younger boys and girls who ridicule them. To avoid this shame, they often opt to drop out. The following are excerpts from some learners about their experiences with repetition.

Grace said:

“I never passed in class, got discouraged to repeat and dropped out in standard 5. I now realise that I was the reason because I did not work hard, peer pressure influenced me, and I involved myself in love relationships. I saw no future in school”.

Sarah said:

“I was learning with my younger sister, and I failed my last exams which my younger sister passed. That meant that she would be ahead of me. I quitted school, I couldn’t imagine being behind my younger sister. Then the head-teacher called me and promoted me to standard 7 where my younger sister was, but I came to school for only three days then I dropped-out for good”.

Jerad said:

“I left because the time I was in school my younger brothers passed the final exams and found me in the class I was, I failed the final exams again whereby the twin-brothers passed and left me behind. So, I decided to stop. Besides that, my brother said he will not give me examination fees because I had repeated, so I stopped going to school as my brother also wanted to concentrate on those doing well”.

Davie:

“I dropped-out because I usually failed in examinations. I was often absent and did not learn most of the stuff that my friends learnt. My teachers used to beat me when I am late, and this promoted my frequent absenteeism”.

Fatsani:

“I failed exams and was not promoted to the next class. I felt shy to learn with the younger boys and girls. I am 17 years old, and my classmates were very young. My failure in class was mainly due to overworking at home since I only lived with my grandmother who is old. My mother remarried so it is me who fends for the family and do the chores. I also got very sick towards exams”.

Enock said:

“I dropped out because I am not intelligent. I could pass in 1 subject only and fail the rest. I could not remember what I learnt or read”.

Repeating a class robbed most of the interviewed drop-outs a chance to continue with their school. Gondwe (2006) recommends grade promotion for all learners and suggests the provision of remedial academic assistance. The repetition policy has many negative effects such as disturbing peer relationships as friends in the same class may find each other get separated upon one being promoted. Repetition also gives repeaters low self-esteem, and often repeaters develop a negative attitude towards school, which eventually leads to school drop-out. In terms of school operations, high levels of grade repetition often led to increased classroom sizes which results into classroom management problems. Teachers with big classroom sizes fail to meet individual learners’ expectations and bond less with their students. In such scenario, learners with problem behaviours, social challenges, do not receive adequate help and end up dropping-out (Jere, 2006).

This study understands that class repetition is a factor that cannot be entirely tackled by school governance structures at community level. It is a policy issue that needs to be handled at a higher level. The school governance structures could present the issue to higher authorities at the District Council so that they advocate for a change of policy at central government. However, school governance structures including teachers can also set interventions that would minimise class repetition as well as work with those that have repeated to ensure that they do not drop-out. Some of the interventions would be providing counselling and guidance to those who have failed to go to the next class and arranging for after school lessons in coordination with other stakeholders. Studies have shown that after school lessons boost the academic achievement of below average learners (Lynch, 2016).

The Education Sector Analysis (2019) explains that Malawi adopted Grade Promotion Policy in 2018 which advocates against class repetition. However, sensitisation on the implementation of this policy has not been widely done. Some schools in the study got information on this policy but are reluctant to implement because they believe that the policy would promote laziness among learners. The Government of Malawi through Ministry of Education, Science and Technology will need to make this policy known and ensure its implementation to reduce the number of learners’ dropping-out.

4.1.1.3 Peer pressure

Peer Pressure is a kind of a social pressure on people to adopt a type of behaviour, dress, or attitude to be accepted as part of a group (Otieno, 2017). This can positively or negatively affect the character and behaviour of a person. In this study, negative peer pressure was explained as a third reason why learners had to drop-out from school. Two of the study respondents confessed that they had support from their parents, but they opted to follow their peers' behaviour and conduct. They did not care about the benefits of school, but instead, acted to please a friend/group of friends.

Beauty:

“I dropped out when I saw that my friend also dropped. My parents who stay in South Africa commanded that I go back to school, but I refused”.

George:

“I dropped out because of my deviant behaviour. My parents tried to counsel me, but I never listened. I never worked hard; all my efforts went to living a carefree life with a group of my friends. I was involved in love affairs and absconded most of the classes. I saw no future in school”.

4.1.2. Causes of school drop out from the perspective of school governance structures.

From the perspective of school governance structures, school drop-out is mainly caused by abuses that children go through at their homes, especially child labour. It is believed that most children, especially orphans or those who live with relatives other than their biological parents, do many household chores before going to school which makes them become tired and therefore, concentrate less in class. According to the International Labour Organisation, the term ‘child labour’ is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. A member of Mother Group from Matewu said ‘Some learners are told to wake up very early in the morning and before they get prepared for school, they sweep the compound, wash

dishes, draw water and cook. By the time they get to school, they are already tired. Such learners do not do well in class and when they fail, they drop out because of disappointment’.

Secondly, the study found out that learners drop out due to high illiteracy level of parents. ‘Illiterate parents fail to encourage or support their children’s education. It is difficult for an illiterate parent to value education in villages. They prefer having son in-laws as it is prestigious among their fellow, it is a sign that they are elders in the community’, said the PTA member at Changuluwe. This corresponds to what the head-teachers at Matewu and Mchirawengu articulated, saying most uneducated parents do not bother encouraging their children to go back to school when they drop-out because they find no value in education. Other parents even say, “education is useless as we can see those who completed secondary school are just farming like us. This, however, applies to most of the illiterate parents, but not all”, said the head-teacher at Matewu primary school.

Thirdly, children who drop-out were reported to have character problems. The school governance structures described them as unruly, who do not care about parental advice. They explained that the behaviour is perpetuated by drug and substance abuse and the misunderstanding of human rights. ‘Children misinterpret their rights. When parents guide them contrary to what they want, they claim that their rights are being infringed upon. This thing called human rights has spoiled many children. They no longer listen to parental advice, and they say do not infringe my rights whenever they are being counselled’, the SMC member narrated at Chasato.

Another factor was poverty. It was discussed that many families struggle to fend for their families. This is perpetuated by increased household family sizes in the targeted communities. On average, families have 4 children and to provide development fees, examination fees, notebooks, school uniform and other necessities to four or more children, becomes difficult to the needy households. This discourages children from such families to continue with their education. A mother group member at Mchirawengu said, ‘children, especially adolescents feel very uncomfortable when they are poorly dressed among their peers. Even when they keep on being sent back home to collect development or examination fees, they get embarrassed why it should always be them, and later give up on their studies’. The SGS also mentioned that some learners resort to doing piece work during classes to meet their basic needs such as food. Some parents prefer the help of their children when doing piece work even during school time so that they can do more to earn more. All this comes because of poverty.

Child marriages was reported as another major reason for school drop-out by school governance structures from all the 6 schools involved in the study. Learners especially girls dropped out due to child marriages and teen-age pregnancies. An SMC member at Echikhangeni said ‘They marry men who already dropped from school. Most of these are men who work in South Africa and girls admire the goods that they bring from South Africa during holidays. This makes them prefer marrying them other than continuing with their education’. The PTA Chairperson at Changuluwe lamented that ‘Our children envy men who migrate to South Africa because they come back home with assorted rare items like TVs, big mattresses, and bicycles. They are further demotivated by their friends who went up to secondary level but have no tangible thing to do. They think marriage is the best solution’. From the PTA Chairperson’s explanation, the study discovered that lack of role modelling and high unemployment rate for unskilled workers also perpetuates child marriages. The study gathered that the few educated elites from rural communities are fond of building retirement homes in town, and villagers do not appreciate the wealth that they accumulate in town unlike those who work in South Africa. Furthermore, those who completed their last secondary school grade are rarely absorbed in the labour force, and this also demotivates learners to complete their education as they see no benefit of doing so.

4.1.3. Causes of school drop out from the perspective of Head Teachers

Head teachers mentioned child marriages as a major cause of school drop-out. Children find school unworthy as they lack role models and admire men who work in South Africa.

Headteachers of 3 schools involved in the study attributed to the issue of parents’ low illiteracy levels, as one of the major causes of school drop-out, saying parental illiteracy makes it hard for parents to appreciate teachers’ efforts on educating their children. ‘Illiterate parents do not help their children in schoolwork. They are less supportive, and this gives room to high school drop-out’, said headteacher of Matewu.

In all the 5 schools, head-teachers mentioned that class repetition contributed to more than half of the number of school drop-outs. ‘Learners who repeat classes look at themselves as too old to learn with those who were behind them. Younger learners also mock them that they are too old to be at school. This makes them consider dropping out of school’, narrated the head-teacher of Ehlaleni. This corresponds with a study done by Roderick (1994) on the relationship between grade retention and school drop-out with data collected from school transcript information on youths who

comprised the Fall River, Massachusetts, public school's Seventh Grade Class of 1980-1981. The results showed that 80% of those who repeated a grade dropped out of school. Jere (2006) explains that school-imposed grade repetition is stressful to students and associated with reduced self-esteem, impaired peer relationship, alienation from school, social stigma and sharply increase likelihood of school drop-out.

4.1.4. Causes of school drop out from the perspective of in school learners.

In school learners mentioned age of a learner as a major cause for school drop-out. They said fellow learners mock those who look much older, and this makes them drop out. 'When older boys and girls hear younger ones say, you are too big to be at school, they feel uncomfortable and end up dropping', said one learner at Mchirawengu school.

Failure to set goals was another reason why learners drop out of school. In school learners said, other learners come to school because their parents have asked them to do so, but they themselves do not know recognise its importance and do not have goals to push them to remain in school. 'I am still in school because I want to become a teacher when I grow up, but others do not know what they will be when they grow up and finish school. This is why they find it easier to drop-out, narrated a Standard 7 learner at Chasato.

The study found out that learners also drop-out of school due to lack of parental care. Some parents do not provide school necessities to the learners such as school uniform, writing materials and development and school report fee. When teachers send back such learners now and then, they get demotivated and quit. 'Some of our friends would come to school with torn uniform, such people rarely finish school because they feel humiliated' narrated a schoolgirl at Changuluwe.

Class repetition was another reason for dropping out. In school, learners explained that drop-out gets discouraged to remain in the same class for some time and opt to drop-out. This also relates to age because when they keep on repeating, they find themselves learning with the young ones who were a class or two behind them.

The discussion of the results on factors that lead to school drop-out was guided by Systems Theory which articulates that problems cannot be successfully solved if interrelated components can be studied separately. The study was informed by the key community structures responsible for promoting education, thus school governance structures, head-teachers, PEAs, and learners

themselves. In relation to this theory, this study took the viewpoint that there is a situation that needs to be understood and solutions to be found.

The study revealed that different school stakeholders have different opinions on factors that lead to school drop-out.

One underlying factor for school drop-out which all the stakeholders involved in the study alluded to was poverty. In the literature review, Naunje (2004) explains that children prioritise activities that would give them food than meeting the education needs. During the interviews, this cause did not come as direct as this. But some drop-outs explained that their parents failed to give them examination fees, like in the case of Jerad. Some parents leave children behind when they go to South Africa to work as casual labourers because according to their interviewed children, (two of the drop-outs), they could not afford finding the basic needs in Malawi. Poverty as a cause of school drop-out, according to Systems Theory, belongs to an external environment of which school governance structures cannot entirely have control over and cannot be discussed in detail in this study, whose analysis is done from the perspectives of school governance structures. This calls for interventions from other actors like central government and non-governmental organisations. The study is aware of government initiatives to eradicate extreme poverty, like the Social Cash Transfer Programme. But there is a need for the study which will assess the impact of such programmes on school drop-outs. The study also recognises non-governmental organisations' efforts in bringing the projects that eradicate the effect of poverty on education such as school meals programme where they provide porridge to selected schools and provide school necessities to the ultra-poor. This assists in some way as evidenced by WFP Malawi fact sheet (2021), which indicates that school feeding programme reduced school drop-out by 2.9%, and absenteeism by 5%. This, however, addresses short term hunger. Poverty is broad and needs comprehensive interventions which is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, most of these school feeding programmes are project based and are subject to phasing out. Communities then through mother groups need to sustain them for continued positive outcomes on school drop-out. According to the Mother Group Manual (n.d), Mother Groups are mandated to coordinate school feeding programmes. However, only 2 of the 6 schools studied had school feeding programme indicating a gap for some mother groups to execute their roles properly.

From the lens of school governance structures, the factors leading to school drop-out included long distances, child abuses, child marriages, teenage pregnancies, parental illiteracy, and poverty. In this study, these belong to the external group as they are what people observe to be challenges that children face, and that could result into school drop-out. Aspects that were mentioned on child abuses related to lack of parental care and forms part of the statistics under lack of parental care. However, when in school learners and school drop-outs themselves were met through Focus Group discussions and in-depth interviews respectively, four major causes of school drop-out that emerged were class repetition, peer pressure of deviant behaviour, poverty, and parental neglect.

The school drop-outs explained from their experience while in school learners discussed what they hear and learn from their peers. None of the drop-outs mentioned long distance, lack of menstrual hygiene, child marriage and child abuse as some of the factors that led them to drop. However, some factors mentioned by school governance structures cannot be ruled out as they may apply to learners who drop out in junior classes, such causes like long distances and parental illiteracy. Some of the factors mentioned by school governance structures such as child marriages, teenage pregnancies emanate from lack of parental care and guidance, poverty, and peer pressure. They are an effect of these root causes. For instance, a child that is overburdened at home may resort to getting married early so that she concentrates on one thing (home management). Others engage in unprotected sexual affairs to take care of their unmet socio-economic needs and fall pregnant in the process, and later drop-out of school. These factors are interrelated, but the root causes remain lack of parental care, class repetition, poverty, and peer pressure.

The Malawi Education Statistics (2022) concurs with the findings as it presents family responsibilities as the highest cause of school drop-out with 26.7%, followed by poverty with 25.1%. The National Education Sector Investment Plan (2020-2030) indicate that primary education continues to face high repetition rate which eventually leads to drop-out and low school completion rate. In 2017/2018 academic year, 21% of learners repeated classes. According to the plan, repetition can be linked to lack of school readiness for primary entry, absenteeism and low learning outcomes by students, lack of knowledge and skills for teachers to address the diverse needs of learners.

Apart from school governance structures and the government, non-governmental organisations through their programming, focus more on menstrual hygiene, role modelling, and life skills,

meant to address absenteeism due to menstrual cycle, adoption of Sexual Reproductive Health and motivating learners to continue schooling. In the case of the study area, there was Education Department of the Synod of Livingstonia which was implementing a project called 'Securing Children's rights through Education and Protection' in partnership with SAVE the Children. The communities appreciated the robust interventions brought by the project to address school drop-out that comes because of child marriages and teenage pregnancies. However, children kept on getting married and having teenage pregnancies. A drop-out from Chasato was actively involved in the project's activities such as Sexual Reproductive Health Club and Child Parliament. However, she still dropped because her parents moved to South Africa, and she was on pressure to balance school and household chores. This suggests a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of school-drop out by concerned stakeholders to align the interventions with such problems.

School Government Structures in the study area are considered in high esteem projects that aim at infrastructure development such as buying desks, constructing schools; and encouraging guidance/civic education by Mother Groups to learners on menstrual hygiene, child abuse and importance of school. These interventions are good and helpful. However, the study reveals that major problems are left unattended to. These include class repetition, peer pressure, poverty, and lack of parental care. These are key as they hit learner's psycho-social and economic well-being and holistic support. Roderick (1994) conducted a study on the relationship between grade retention and school drop-out, and he discovered that 80% of those who repeated a grade dropped-out. Learners that perform below average require utmost attention for them to continue school. Teachers need to do their part by providing remedial work, by establishing counselling services at school (possibly by the trained mother group members), by targeting them would also help. Poverty is one such factor that needs multi-sectoral approach. As the study indicated earlier, some factors can be solved while others are external to the SGSs and can partially be solved.

4.2. The extent to which school governance structures play their roles from the perspective of school governance structures themselves.

4.2.1. Roles of Mother Group

The interviews revealed that mother group is a structure at school which mainly targets learners with a special focus on girls. There are four roles of mother groups that are commonly known by the SGS themselves across the six schools involved in the study.

The first role is providing guidance and counselling to learners on the importance of school. Mother groups provide talks at school on aspects that encourage learners to remain in school. ‘We gather learners together and teach them why they need to continue with school’ explained one mother group member from Echikhangeni school.

Secondly, Mother Groups take back girls from marriages and bring them back to school. Mother Groups also visit drop-outs and convince them to re-enroll at school. At Mchirawengu, Mother Group secretary explained, ‘we liaise with head-teachers to give us names of learners that are not coming to school. Then we go to their homes and meet both the drop-out and his or her parents/guardians. We discuss with them why the child needs to go back to school’.

Thirdly, they ensure that girls’ hygiene is maintained. They put hand washing facilities, ensure there are bathrooms for girls, and teach girls how to make pads. They do this to enable girls to be comfortable during their menstrual cycle so that they are not absent from school or drop-out due to this. ‘We understand that our young girls feel uncomfortable when learning while having menstrual period. They are not confident to walk around, thinking that they might have stained their clothes. This is why mother group comes in to ensure that a school has a girls’ toilet which is combined with a bathroom so that it serves the hygiene need of girls when experiencing menses at school’ said a mother group member from Chasato.

Lastly, individual schools like Changuluwe, added that mother groups are there to abolish harmful cultural practices that can affect education. They also reported that mother groups ensure that children are not abused at home by encouraging learners to report any abusive behaviour that they face. ‘We have been so active in advocating against harmful cultural practices like the coming-of-age rituals where a girl would be locked in a house for 7 days when she has experienced her first monthly period. We fight any cultural practice that disturbs children’s education’, explained a mother group member from Ehlaleni.

4.2.2. Roles of Parents Teachers Association

Commonly, the study found out that there were two roles that each school participating in the study mentioned about PTA.

All the structures in the 6 schools that participated in the study explained that PTA ensures coordination between parents, teachers, and learners. This committee brings together key

stakeholders at school level and ensures mutual agreement among them. ‘We are the bridge between the community and the school. We organise meetings between teachers and parents, and ensure that each structure does its part’, said PTA members at Chasato.

Secondly, it was unanimously mentioned across the 6 schools that the PTA is entrusted with the overall supervision of school development. They are key in the planning and implementation of school development, especially through monitoring of school projects. At Matewu, the PTA Chairperson said, ‘The PTA is a supreme body at school. It monitors how the school is run. It supervises even the projects that are run by other school structures’.

Adding on the roles of PTA at Chasato school, it was further explained that the PTA safeguards school boundaries to keep it from encroachment, they lobby for teachers and regulate the behaviour of teachers and learners. ‘When we have few teachers at school, we are responsible for lobbying for additional ones through our district education office’ PTA member, Chasato.

At Matewu, PTA was also viewed as the most powerful school governance body, which oversees all the others. They summon nonfunctioning structures as a way of reminding them to do their work properly.

At Changuluwe, PTA was responsible for ensuring that education is inclusive and that no one is left behind, especially after the school was involved in an inclusive project supported by an NGO.

4.2.3. Roles of School Management Committee

The committee across the 5 schools was reported to be the overseer of school projects, especially those that involve building, using the money given to schools called School Improvement Plan Funds. Such projects include building and or renovating school blocks and teachers’ houses. ‘We plan together with other structures and teachers on infrastructure development of the school. When the work commences, we monitor and provide feedback to other structures and parents,’ said the SMC chairperson at Mchirawengu.

The SMC is also responsible for regulating teachers’ behaviour such as punctuality, and drunkenness among others. They check how learners learn by supervising teachers if they follow their teaching and learning timetables. This is the role that the study revealed to be done to a lesser extent because teachers are considered most educated and superior in the communities, while at

the same time, members of the SMC are less educated and have low self-esteem to approach the educated teachers on most issues.

Additionally, the SMC at Chasato mentioned that they keep school resources, while Matewu SMC explained that they even check if learners are abused and connect them with relevant stakeholders. At Changuluwe, it is the duty of the SMC to check learners that are often absent and link them to Mother Group for counselling. 'We ask data about school attendance from the head-teacher, and when provided, we ask Mother Groups to visit those children that have been absent for so long,' narrated the SMC member at Changuluwe.

4.2.4. Roles of school governance structures from learners' and drop-outs' perspectives.

From the perspective of drop-outs and learners, the roles of mother group were commonly known as withdrawing girls who got married. The committee enrolled back such learners to school. They also visit school drop-outs and liaise with them to re-enroll at school and give guidance on the importance of school to girls.

Both drop-outs and in school learners identified PTA and school management committee as responsible for development at school. The nature of development was identified as building school blocks and teachers' houses.

The study approached different sectors of people involved in the school system to explore the role of Mother Groups, Parents Teachers Association and School Management Committee in reducing school drop-outs. From the findings, it can be concluded that the School Management Committee is not directly involved in the reduction of school drop-out as they mainly focus on hardware developmental projects at school such as building of teachers' houses, school blocks, purchasing of school resources and ensuring that school funds are properly managed.

The Parents Teachers Association is deemed as a bridge between parents and teachers on the affairs of learners and teachers. The committee leads in bringing together parents and teachers to discuss issues involving them. The meetings are normally done during school closing ceremonies because parents are normally found in good numbers during that time. Through discussions with the committees, it was discovered that the PTA does not put special effort to engage parents of children with problem behaviours.

This is contrary to what is expected of Parents Teachers Association. According to the Government of Malawi (2008), the Guidelines for the Management of Education Functions devolved to District Assemblies indicate that PTA needs to meet regularly and convene meetings with the community to provide feedback on the running of schools and prevalent issues so that parents intervene.

This is an important committee that does not utilise its powers and fails to execute its duties to help learners remain in school. On the other hand, the School Management Committee needed to link with teachers and identify learners who present early warning signs for drop-out and summon them and their parents on how such students could be helped. This agrees with what Slink and Reimer (n.d.) discusses, that there are three interactional interventions that build on each other to reduce school drop-out and these are: targeting all parents, an assessment to identify high risk families and provision of professional support to identified high risk families.

Mother Group is the most recognised parent body by learners. The study discovered that Mother Groups teach the importance of school, hygiene, and sanitation with emphasis on menstrual hygiene, bringing back learners from marriages and awareness raising on child abuses and where to report. From discussions however, it was indicated that the committee only goes when one has dropped school, is married or pregnant. No other preventive measure was mentioned for the 'would be' drop-outs except for civic education on the above-mentioned topics. Building on the existence and fame that members of the Mother Group have to learners, the government through its decentralised system (District Education Office) can empower some members of the committee with psychosocial counselling trainings so that they intervene early on learners presenting signs of school drop-out. The government should also revise minimum selection criteria of members of SGS into these committees. Some level of education such as Malawi School Leaving Certificate, educated retirees and those with a good reputation should be considered. The study reveals that some structures had no confidence in themselves to execute their duties and to approach teachers on how they can assist prevent school drop-out. It would also be difficult for illiterate members of the committees to initiate the after-school programmes that this study is suggesting and monitor progress.

In a more detailed conversation with SGS themselves on how they are chosen to be in different committees, the study found out that the choice is guided by their commitment and trust from the community. This being the case, education is never considered a factor to consider. As a result,

they are unable to execute some duties properly. This gives them less confidence to approach school authorities on some programmes.

4.3. Approaches used by school governance committees to minimise school drop-out.

The school governance structures use different approaches to promote access to and quality of education at community level. The study assessed approaches used by mother groups to reduce school drop-out. The study discovered that the other two school governance structures practically have no interventions that directly deal with school drop-out problem. They concentrate on building structures like teachers' houses, school blocks and checking the conduct of teachers. Although this is the case, the Malawi Education Act (2013) mandated the PTA to bridge the gap between the school and the community to ensure among other outcomes, good academic performance, and school completion. The study found out that the committee entrusted with direct intervention on school completion is the Mother Group.

According to study results, Mother Groups use the following approaches:

4.3.1. Door to door 'back to school' campaign

Door to door 'back to school campaign' is an approach where Mother Group members visit each drop-out at their homes to convince them to go back to school. A Mother Group member from Chasato said, 'whenever we are tipped by other learners or teachers that a learner has dropped-out of school, we mobilise ourselves and go to his/her home to learn why the learner has dropped and ask them to re-enroll. Sometimes the reasons why they drop-out are lack of uniform and other school materials, which where possible, as mother group, mobilise resources and support such learners'. The other four schools shared similar sentiments. They talk to parents and the drop-outs themselves. Follow up visits are made when drop-outs do not report to school. They also visit learners who get pregnant while at school to coax them to go back to school after giving birth. In this case, they also meet the concerned parents to guide them on how they can support a teenager who has a baby and goes back to school.

4.3.2. Civic Education to learners on school culture and hygiene

The study found out that Mother Groups meet learners at school for some educational talk on the code of conduct at school. They advise on code of dressing, especially among girls that would

protect them from sexual harassment at school which may discourage them to continue with their education. On this, they encourage long uniforms that go beyond their knees.

In all the five schools, it was explained that Mother Groups teach girls how to care for themselves during their menstrual period. ‘Girls feel uncomfortable to stay at school when menstruating. They get a feeling that everyone will notice them and get discouraged to go to school for a week. One week is a long time for a learner to catch up and when they start performing poorly, they drop-out of school. Mother Group then target girls in making pads and promote the construction and use of school bathrooms whenever they are having menstrual period’, narrated a mother group member at Ehlaleni.

4.3.3. Sensitisation on reporting child abuses

Mother Groups also provide awareness to learners on abuses and child protection reporting structures. They encourage them to report abuses done at home as well as at school. They however, denied having skills on providing any professional support such as psychosocial counselling whenever a case is reported. The best that they do is to refer to other authorities.

The discussion with all respondents involved in the study shows that mother group is the main committee which is constantly in contact with learners. The approaches that the committee use are good. However, the study did not find a direct linkage between some approaches and the main causes why learners drop out in the study area. For instance, among the girls who dropped out and the in-school learners interviewed, no one mentioned menstrual hygiene as a reason that has led learners to drop-out of school. It can be an assumption based on other cultures.

As informed by the results, the study recommends to Mother Groups that approaches to address school-drop out in the study area should focus on ensuring holistic parental support to children. It was noted from the discussions that parents who migrated and do not stay together with their children are less involved in the affairs of their children’s school life and had no control and authority over their children. Despite rendering material support to their children as was the case with Jane and Mary, children lacked moral guidance and were overburdened with parental responsibilities over their siblings and grandparents. The availability of parents and or energetic guardians is crucial to children’s retention at school. A combination of moral, physical, material support and encouragement are key to learner retention at school. It is a wrong assumption that the

availability of school materials and all basic needs is enough for the child to remain in school. The school governance structures need to intervene and find solutions together with child protection workers, chiefs, and parents on how best children whose parents migrated for greener pastures can be assisted.

It was also worthy learning that a good number of drop-outs left school because they could not stand learning with the younger boys and girls following their failure and request by school authorities to repeat a class. During discussions on approaches of reducing school drop-out, it was observed that no intervention at school level deals with this problem. The expectation from the researcher was that learners who fail and are required to repeat a class would undergo some guidance and counselling to make them understand the benefit of repeating. The After School Organisation (2013) indicate that learners decide to stay in school or not depending on the level of their engagement. As the school connects learners who are required to repeat a grade with counsellors, the government of Malawi on the other hand need to find ways of ensuring that no learner repeats a class despite their performance as this works as a great disappointment to the learners.

Peer pressure, which results in unruly behaviour, was another frequently mentioned factor for school drop-out. The research reveals that no direct intervention by school governance structures deals with life skills education to learners. However, in schools that work with non-governmental organisations like Matewu, Changuluwe and Chasato, learners mentioned that they belong to life skills and Sexual Reproductive clubs that teach among other topics, dealing with peer pressure. Schools need life skills clubs with or without other implementing agents like NGOs, as they help to regulate learners' conduct. The Ministry of Education need to encourage all schools to promote life skills or Sexual Reproductive Health as compulsory extra-curricular activities. The government of Malawi included life skills as one of the subjects taught in all schools. However, follow up interviews with learners on acquisition of life skills, the study revealed that learners treat lessons from the subject theoretically. They study it to pass examinations, just like they do with other subjects. Facilitating Life Skills or SRH as extracurricular subjects, will attach practicality of the lessons as things will be discussed in a less formal way.

4.4. Gaps in approaches used in reducing school drop-outs.

The study, through interviews and Focus Group Discussions, learnt about the different interventions implemented by Mother Groups and other stakeholders to reduce school drop-out. However, learners keep on dropping-out of school. The UNICEF fact sheet of December 2022 indicates that the primary completion rate in Malawi is 33 per cent, meaning that two-thirds of the children of primary school completion age did not complete primary education. As such, the study went further to examine the gaps in the approaches used. The following gaps were identified:

4.4.1. Lack of strategies to identify early warning signs of school drop-out.

Gaps in reducing school drop-out were observed at prevention level. The Mother Groups were analysed to be more reactive other than proactive when dealing with drop out issues. They put more effort on bringing back learners who married or got pregnant at school but less effort on preventing learners from dropping-out. Learners who drop-out present early warning signs like frequent absenteeism, grade repetition, interest in school, family status number of discipline cases and other problem behaviours (National Centre for Drop-out Prevention, n.d). In the study area, which may also be true to many Malawian government schools, these either go unnoticed or are noticed but less efforts to intervene are made. The school only becomes concerned when a learner has dropped- out. It is at this point that mother group now intervenes to bring back the drop-out learners. Through discussions with drop-outs, in school learners and schools' governance structures themselves, detection of early warning signs was never reported as one of the priority roles for SGSs. It must be understood that for SGSs to act on learners presenting early warning signs, they rely on reports on such from the school through the headteacher. The study discovered that such feedback sessions rarely happen, and this was identified as the entropy in the operations of school governance structures. Schools and these community SGSs ought to constantly share data to retain learners in school.

4.4.2 Lack of coordination between school authorities and parents

The importance of coordination between parents and school cannot be overemphasised. Issues affecting learners, learning outcomes and school management are best understood and can be resolved by these two institutions. In this study, Schools reported that meetings between parents and teachers are not well patronised by parents. Head-teachers that were interviewed attributed

this to high illiteracy levels of parents who care less about their children's education. 'Most parents only come to witness school closing ceremony where they hear the positions of their children in class. At that time, it is difficult to discuss with them bad behaviours that teachers might have observed in their children so that they also intervene. It is worse for parents whose children do not do well in class, the majority do not come at all', head- teacher, Matewu school said. General issues are presented during such events, but individual learner challenges need more closed meetings which are rarely conducted. It is the role of Parents Teachers Association to call for such interface meetings between parents, school authority member(s) and the learner her/himself. If such meetings are not taking place as expected, the PTA needed to creatively find ways of motivating parents to start attending them.

The study also found out that there is lack of coordination between the school and school governance bodies. With a well-coordinated school structure, more innovative initiatives can be initiated at school that would reduce school drop-out. For instance, if the school governance structures can coordinate with chiefs and other community stakeholders, they can initiate children after school learning sessions with the help of locally identified auxiliary teachers. This would assist average learners to pick up and reduce repetition and it could also shape those who have deviant behaviours as they will have less time to practice the unacceptable behaviours.

According to the National Education Sector Analysis (2019), School Management Committees and PTA have been deemed dormant to effectively execute their roles. They predominantly and effectively organise the maintenance of school infrastructure but have not been good to bring unity and collaboration between the school and communities. There is very little participation from communities and parents in other more contentious school management issues, such as the monitoring of teachers' performance. One key reason for this is the lack of training for School Management Committees and for school staff. This is compounded by the poor relations that exist in many situations between staff and communities. Communities often lack confidence to deal with better educated teachers, while at the same time, teachers often fear and resent School Management Committees since they see them as a potential mechanism to exercise power and control over them. The study found out that selection of members of school governance structures only depended on the trust that the community has on them, the members behaviour, commitment, and dedication. The communities are not guided to consider education status of those they select

to be members of PTA, SMC, and Mother Groups. The uneducated committee members, hence lack confidence to engage teachers on pertinent issues affecting their school and their understanding of education is relatively low to articulate and initiate programmes that would reduce school drop-out. One drop-out at Mchirawengo said, sometimes it does not make sense when a Mother Group member encourages you to go back to school and yet herself and her children are not educated'. The National Education Sector Analysis (2019) also states that one major challenge affecting primary education is weak school-based management which needs improvement by rendering supervision, advisory and inspection support.

4.4.3. Lack of Intensive Sexual Reproductive Health Education to Learners

School governing structures reported teenage pregnancies and child marriages as some of the reasons why learners drop-out of school. When more probing was done on whether learners access Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Education, neither learners nor school governing structures and teachers mentioned the availability of such services except for Changuluwe, Chasato and Matewu where there is a project supported by a Non-Governmental Organisation called Education Department, Synod of Livingstonia and Save the Children. Without involvement of NGOs, learners get some knowledge of SRHR during life skills lessons which is more formal, and some may not relate to reality. While at home, it is a taboo for parents to discuss SRHR topics with their children. This creates knowledge gap on SRHR among learners who end up using whatever information they get from peers. Radios also provide SRHR messages, but the percentage of households with radios as well as the number of young people who listen to radios is minimal. A 2019 survey report on access and use of ICTs by households and individuals by MISA Malawi revealed that only 46.3 households in Malawi owned a functional radio in 2019.

4.4.4. Lack of school counselling services especially targeting those who repeat classes.

Malawian schools do not have established school counselling services targeting learners with various psychosocial issues. Mother groups are reported to conduct talks with girls in general but are not trained to handle individual issues affecting learners. Learners who drop out of school due to poor performance, lack of parental support, child labour need services of a counsellor who may further link them to other necessary services.

4.4.5. Community Coordinated Children’s Activities

Learners need to be kept busy at home. It was discovered during data collection that some learners drop out of school due to peer pressure. Boys specifically take after their fellow who drink alcohol and smoke during their free time. This is coupled with high illiteracy levels of parents who fail to encourage their children to study at home. Establishing reading centres at community level and employing teachers to run them would be helpful to such children as this will keep them busy. The school governance structures can link with other community stakeholders to make this work to reduce cases of school drop-out.

4.5. Generated Model

The study, after an analysis of the causes of school drop-out, roles of school governance structures, strategies used to minimise school drop-out and gaps identified to successfully address school drop-out developed a theory on how the school governance structures can tackle school drop-out. The theory was informed by the data collected in the study.

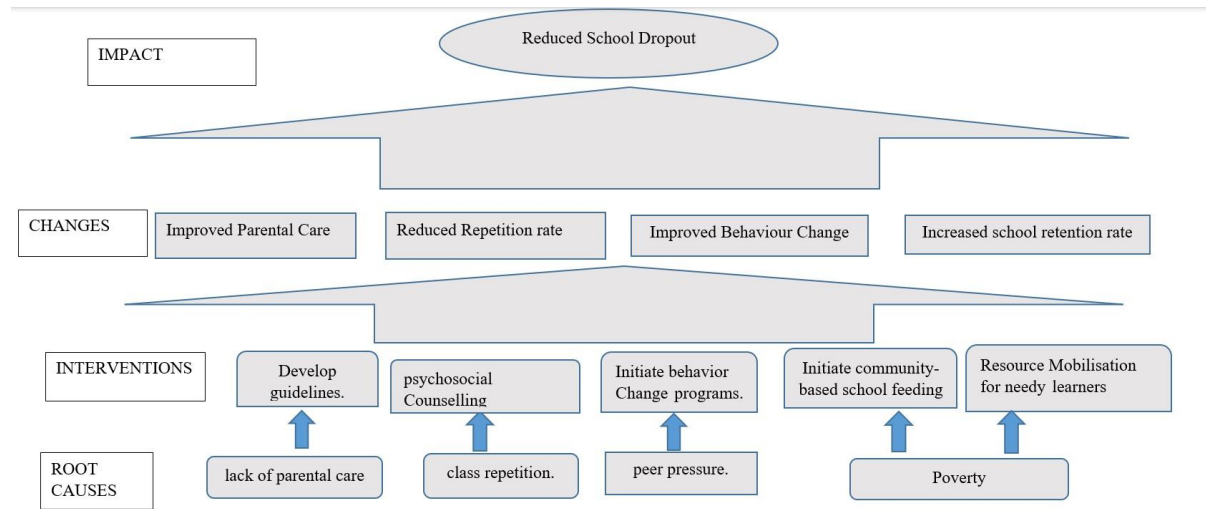


Figure 4. 2: Theory of change for reducing school drop-out

This model recommends a contextual exploration of the root causes of school drop-out. The designing of interventions should relate to the identified causes. The school governance structures in accordance with their designated roles must take up different initiatives that aim at reducing school drop-out. Identification of learners who are at risk of dropping out is a universal intervention

that every school needs to do through the head-teachers. This activity leads to the identification of varying individual learner challenges and needs. In this study, lack of parental care was identified, whose interventions include developing community guidelines on children's care especially those whose parents travelled. This needs to be done by PTA and the community leadership such as chiefs.

Another cause of school drop-out was class repetition. The repeaters go through emotional stress, lose self-esteem, and need psychosocial counselling which Mother Group should provide to ensure that they get their confidence back and understand why they are repeating. These can also benefit from school-initiated life skills clubs which the SMC should initiate. External to school governance structures include initiatives like enhancing grade promotion policy by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, but also remedial classes provided by class teachers so that the below average performers should boost their performance.

The model also illustrates that peer pressure/deviant behaviour as another factor leading to school drop-out. These need to be targeted with social and behaviour change initiatives such as life skills clubs, which should be done by PTA and SMC, respectively. Early identification of possible drop-outs and engaging them together with their parents on a serious discussion on how they can undo the undesirable behaviour can also help resolve this causative factor.

The model presents poverty as another factor leading to school drop-out. The impact of poverty can be minimised through school feeding programme and resource mobilisation to support the needy with school necessities. Needy learners also require engagement and encouragement to focus on where school can take them. The study acknowledged that this factor needs more other external support to be curbed. However, there is a role that school governance structures can play to ensure that household poverty does not influence school drop-out. Learners will even be motivated to go to school so that they eat apart from getting education. According to the Mother Group Manual (n.d), this is one of the roles of Mother Groups.

This chapter identified and discussed poverty, peer pressure, lack of parental care and class repetition as main factors leading to school drop out in the study area. The extent to which SGSs execute their roles relating to school drop-out was analysed and mother group unlike PTA and SMC was identified to be actively involved in carrying out their roles. However, the approaches used were responsive and not proactive. The chapter also discussed gaps in the approaches used.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This chapter presents conclusions derived from the findings of this study, recommendations that have been made, and areas for further research.

5.1. Conclusion

This study analysed factors that lead to school drop-out in selected primary schools in Mzimba South Education District and the role that school governance structures play to minimise the problem. Factors that lead to high school drop-out were established through in-depth interviews with those who dropped-out of school, through focus group discussions targeting school governance structures and in school learners. A further analysis was made on approaches used by school governance structures to address school drop-out. The researcher further identified gaps in the approaches used by the school governance structures to reduce school drop-out.

The study, after a thorough analysis on factors that lead to school drop-out concludes that the major reasons that lead to school drop-out include lack of parental care, class repetition, poverty, and peer pressure. Through the in-depth interviews with drop-outs and focus group discussions with school learners, these four came out vividly. Other structures alluded to them indirectly. The school governance structures, and head teachers pointed at long distances travelled by learners, misunderstanding on human rights, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, parental illiteracy, lack of good infrastructure and lack of role models as factors leading to school drop-out. Since the study targeted teenagers, there is a possibility that young children below the age of ten drop out because of some reasons mentioned by the School Governance Structures such as long distances. Other factors mentioned by headteachers, and school governance structures are immediate effects of the four root causes identified by drop-outs and in school learners.

The study found out that Mother Group as compared to School Management Committee and Parents and Teachers' Association play a commendable role in reducing school drop-out. However, it was observed that their interventions are more of a response than prevention. Major of them is bringing back to school those who dropped or have teenage pregnancies. On the other hand, School Management Committee and Parents Teachers Association focus more on infrastructure development and management of resources at the school, and are less identified with learner activities.

In this research, approaches used to minimise school drop-outs were analysed. These ranged from civic educating learners on the importance of school, hygiene and identifying and reporting abuses that they may experience. Other approaches included bringing back those who dropped-out and recruiting learners to be in project based Life Skills Clubs. However, when comparing with the major causes of school drop-outs, the study concludes that more approaches are needed. The school governance structures need to devise a way of identifying learners with early warning signs of dropping and providing professional counselling to such. The school governance structures may refer other cases of such learners to other service providers when need be. School based counselling is also a need and those with performance problems ought to be assisted through this.

The programming of school governance structures to reduce school drop-out had gaps. One key gap was on identifying preventive measures to curb school drop-out such as identification and intervening on early warning signs as well as establishing a counselling structure at school.. Other gaps included aligning strategies to major causes of school drop-out. Another gap was inadequate coordination of parents and teachers to iron out students' behavioural issues and enhance tailor made programmes.

It can be concluded therefore, that efforts are made by school governance structures, especially the Mother Group, to reduce school drop-out. However, more efforts are geared towards response rather than prevention. It is also important that efforts should be made to inquire the root causes leading to drop out, thus they should target factors that the affected themselves consider as reasons why they dropped-out, and not what authorities from their observations think are the reasons.

The study understands that the community has a great role to play to prevent school drop-out. However, there are some factors leading to school drop out that needs policy intervention. One critical factor was class repetition. It is within the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to enhance promotion of all learners to the next grade as a way of eliminating class repetition while putting deliberate arrangement for their remedial classes. The study has established that learners who repeat classes feel uncomfortable to learn with their younger fellows. They also suffer mockery from the latter. As such, they look at dropping-out as the best solution.

It can be concluded that there is room for improvement on the functions of school governance structures at grassroot level. This can be done by the structures themselves, the community authorities, and the district councils. Key to the success of SGS programming is coordination

among structures and other players in the education sector such as parents, head teachers, chiefs, and the district council. However, there are roles that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology also need to play to ensure reduction of school drop-out.

5.2. Recommendations

The study recommends that school governance structures should accommodate strategies that directly address the identified causes of school drop-out. These include advocating through chiefs, the availability of community rules that parents who migrate to another area should follow; stipulating how to provide care and support to the children left behind. Some rules may include enrolling their children at boarding schools where they will not be required to balance both school and household work or employ a maid to assist with some chores at home. This may apply mostly to those who leave their children and migrate to South Africa in search for greener pastures, which is very common in the study area. The SGSs can also refer some cases to social welfare for further guidance. This will tackle lack of parental care as a cause for school drop-out. Another strategy that SGS can coordinate is the initiation of school feeding program which will attract children from poverty-stricken families to continue schooling.

The study also recommends that Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should enforce the newly developed Grade Promotion Policy. The Ministry should conduct robust sensitisations and make the implementation of the policy compulsory. This will reduce drop outs that come as a result of grade repetition. Since the policy is legally binding, The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology will spend less on sensitisation through media and existing education fora.

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should build the capacity of School Governance Structures so that they effectively execute their roles. The capacity building should focus on training Mother Groups in psychosocial counselling so that they respond to individual learners' psychosocial needs, equip school management committee with skills to identify and intervene on early warning signs for school drop-out and equip PTA with knowledge and skills on community engagement.

The study further recommends that school governance structures should employ more preventive rather than responsive interventions that directly correspond to major causes of school drop-out in their context. The study shows that the school governance structures employ civic education on menstrual hygiene, importance of school and abuses in a bid to retain learners in schools. However, key approaches to deal with lack of parental care, class repetition and peer pressure were not identified. Only schools that had projects by NGOs had Life Skills as an extra curricula activity that directly deals with children's behaviour (tackling peer pressure). It is therefore, important to

match preventive approaches to major factors leading to school drop-out. Some of the approaches that this study recommends include introduction of Life Skills Clubs. The opening of reading centres, provision of school based psychosocial counselling services, and initiating or sustaining school feeding programme. Reading centres will keep learners with problem behaviours busy and assisted. They will have less time to loiter around. Reading centres will also assist the below average learners to catch up. Repetition will then be reduced and so will the drop-out rate. School Feeding Programme will motivate learners from ultra-poor households to come to school as their hunger needs will be met.

5.3. Areas for further study

Further studies should evaluate the scope of modules and trainings given to school governance structures. The evaluation will show gaps that will guide the Ministry of Education on how they can further strengthen the roles of SGS to ensure retention of learners in school.

A comparative study on education outcomes between countries that implement Class Repetition Policy and those implementing Grade Promotion Policy should be done. The study will inform the Ministry of Education on how to improve the newly adopted Grade Promotion Policy for its effectiveness.

Another scholar should conduct a study on the nature of support that works for child headed families to promote their education. The study should focus on what the community can do as well as the role that the government can play.

This study was limited in scope due to financial constraints; future researchers should be resourceful to cover wider population for good data representation and generalization of results.

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Appendices

Annex 1: Data Collection Tools

A. Interview Guides

i. Interview guide for school drop-outs.

1. Did you have PTA, Mother Groups and School Management Committees at your previous school?
 - 1b. Kasi uko mukasambiranga sukulu kale, ma komiti gha mother gulupu, Parents Teachers Association na School Management ghakawako?
2. What are the roles of these committees if you know them?
 - 2b. Ntchito za makomiti agha ni vichi pala mukuzimanya?
3. How do students benefit from their existence?
 - 3b. Ma komiti aya yali na chandulo uli ku wana wasukulu?
4. Tell me the reasons why you dropped-out of school.
 - 4b. Munganiphalirako chifukwa icho mukalekera sukulu panthowa?
5. Whom did you discuss your problem with?
 - 5b. Suzgo ili mukaphalirapo njani?
6. Did you get the assistance that you needed?
 - 6b. Kasi mukapokera wowwiri uwo mukakhumbanga?
7. How do you think you could have been helped?
 - 7b. Imwe mukuona kuti mphanyi mukavwirika uli?
8. What are the other reasons that lead to learner drop out?
 - 8b. Pali vifukwa uli vinyake ivo vikupangiska kuti wana walekere panthowa sukulu?
9. What could be the solutions to those other problems?
 - 9b. Kasi pangawa nthowa uli zakumazgira vifukwa vinyake ivyo vikupangiska kuti wana walekere sukulu panthowa.

ii. Interview guide for Head Teachers

1. How many learners dropped out of school in the past academic year?
2. What were the reasons for their drop-out?
3. What could have been done to avoid the situation? (drop-out?)
4. Do you have PTA/SMC and Mother Groups at this school?
5. Tell me the roles of any of these structures.
6. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that learners do not drop- out of school?

iii. Interview guide for Primary Education Advisor/DEM

1. Do you provide trainings to Mother Groups, SMC, and PTA committees?
2. What are the roles of these individual committees?
3. In your opinion, do they successfully fulfil their roles?
4. What are some challenges that prevent them from fulfilling their roles?
5. In your opinion, does increased school drop-out mean that the three committees are inefficient to do their job?
6. What more could be done to reduce school drop-out?

B. Focus Group Discussion guides

I. FGD Guide for School Governance Committees

1. What does it take to be in your committee?
 - 1b. Kasi ni wanthu uli awo wakwenera kusangika mu committee yinu?
2. What are your roles at this school?
 - 2b. Kasi milimo yinu njakuti uli pa sukulu?
3. Do you have an idea of how many learners dropped out of school in the past academic year?
 - 3b. Kasi mukumanya kuti ni wana walinga awo wali kulekera school panthowa chaka chamala?
4. What were the reasons for their drop-out?
 - 4b. Kasi ni vifukwa uli ivyo vikapangiska kuti waleke?
5. What could have been done to ensure that they do not drop-out?
 - 5b. Kasi ni ndondomeko uli izo zati zipangiskenge kuti wana awo walutilire nasukulu?
6. Whose responsibility is it to ensure learners do not drop out.
 - 6b. Kasi ni udindo wanjani kuoneskeska kuti wana waleke kulekera panthowa sukulu?

II. FGD Guide for In-School Learners

1. Do you know how many of your friends dropped-out of school last year and this year?
 - 1b. Kasi mukumanyapo wanyinu walinga awo walikulekera sukulu panthowa chaka chamala na chaka chino?
2. What made them to drop-out?
 - 2b. Ntchivichi icho chikawapangiska kuti walekere sukulu panthowa?
3. What has made you not to drop-out?
 - 3b. Ntchivichi icho chikapangiska kuti imwe muleke kulekera sukulu panthowa?
4. What can be done to prevent others from dropping out?
 - 4b. Ntchivichi icho chingachitika kuti wanyake walekeso kulekera sukulu panthowa?
5. Do you know any of these committees? (Mother Group, PTA, and School Management Committee?).
 - 5b. Pa makomiti agha, ninga agho mukumanya? (Mother Groups, PTA na school management committee?)
6. What are the roles of these committees at your school?
 - 6b. Kasi ma committee agha ghali na udindo/ntchito uli pa sukulu yinu?
7. Do their roles contribute to reducing school drop-out? How?
 - 7b. Kasi ntchito zawo zikuvwira pakukhizga unandi wa wana awo wakulekera sukulu panthowa? Zikuvwira munthowa uli?

Annex 2: NCST Letter of Approval



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Lingadzi House
Robert Mugabe Crescent
P/Bag B303
City Centre
Lilongwe

Tel: +265 1 771 550
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Website: <http://www.ncst.mw>

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Ref No: NCST/RTT/2/6

25th May 2020

Ms Tina Banda,

Livingstonia Synod AIDS Programme,

P.O. Box 279,

Ekwendeni,

Mzimba.

Email: tinamkokotabanda@gmail.com

Dear Ms Banda,

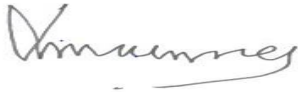
RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR PROTOCOL NO. P.04/20/471: AN ANALYSIS OF APPROACHES USED BY SCHOOL GOVERNANCE COMMITTEES TO MINIMISE SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN LUWEREZI EDUCATION ZONE, MZIMBA DISTRICT

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the National Committee on Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NCRSH) in a format that is available at the Secretariat. Once the study is finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee and the Commission with a final report of the study. The committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



Yalonda I. Mwanza

NCRSH ADMINISTRATOR

HEALTH, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES DIVISION

For: CHAIRMAN OF NCRSH

Committee Address:

Secretariat, National Committee on Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities, National Commission for Science and Technology, Lingadzi House, City Centre, P/Bag B303, Capital City, Lilongwe3, Malawi. Telephone Nos: +265 771 550/774 869; E-mail address: ncrsh@ncst.mw