



Exploring Head Teachers' Management of Disciplinary Cases Involving Teachers of the Opposite Sex in Secondary Schools: The Case of Walemera Cluster in Nkhotakota.

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Paul Christopher Kabwinja Machilika**, declare that “*Exploring Head Teachers' Management of Disciplinary Cases Involving Teachers of the Opposite Sex in Secondary Schools: The Case of Walemera Cluster in Nkhotakota*” is my original work under the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Chrispin Mphande and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. Any references to the work of others have been duly acknowledged. This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Leadership and Management at Mzuzu University.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved wife Memory, my daughters Pauline and Rejoice, my parents Mr. and Mrs. Chakalamba, my brothers and sisters and all relatives and real friends for their unconditional love and encouragement. Special dedication to my parents and my family, whose unwavering support and belief in my potential have been a source of motivation throughout my academic journey.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how head teachers manage disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in secondary schools within the Walemera Cluster of Nkhotakota District. It explores the nature of disciplinary cases, procedures used, teachers' perceptions of head teachers' disciplinary management, and the challenges faced. Using a qualitative approach with interviews and document analysis, findings reveal common cases such as late coming, absenteeism, reporting to work under the influence of alcohol, inappropriate dressing, and lack of lesson preparedness. Gender dynamics significantly influence disciplinary decisions, with some head teachers perceived as biased. The study concludes that structured policies, gender-sensitive training, and transparent communication are essential for effective disciplinary management. It recommends gender-neutral policies, improved conflict resolution mechanisms, and enhanced training for head teachers to promote fairness and professionalism.

Keywords: Disciplinary management, head teachers, gender dynamics, secondary schools, teacher misconduct, Nkhotakota District, Role theory, qualitative study, interpretivism, purposive sampling, case study design, thematic analysis, teacher perceptions, school leadership, policy recommendations.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

EDM – Education Division Manager

PTA – Parents Teachers Association

BoG – Board of Governance

DoSS – Director of Secondary Schools

MIE – Malawi Institute of Education

MoE – Ministry of Education

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

MZUNIREC – Mzuzu University Research and Ethics Committee.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study.

This study examines the management of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in secondary schools in Malawi, with a specific focus on how secondary school head teachers manage such cases. The research aims to explore how female head teachers approach disciplinary issues involving male teachers, and how male head teachers address cases involving female teachers. Disciplinary procedures are a critical aspect of school management, and they become particularly complex when gender dynamics between the head teacher and the teacher involved differ.

Indiscipline refers to a failure or refusal to follow established rules, norms, or codes of conduct within an institution or organization. It often manifests through behaviors such as absenteeism, insubordination, or misconduct (Adenaike & Adebajo, 2021). In the context of teaching, indiscipline can manifest in various forms, including academic dishonesty, sexual harassment, bullying, abuse of authority, and negligence. Such misconduct can have serious consequences on both the individuals involved as well as the overall functioning of the educational institution.

Discipline, on the other hand, refers to the adherence to ethical and professional standards set by regulatory bodies to ensure integrity, fairness, and professionalism in teaching. It involves maintaining appropriate relationships with students, colleagues, and the community, upholding academic honesty, and demonstrating accountability in all professional duties (Hall, 2020). Failure to adhere to these standards may result in disciplinary actions, including warnings, suspension, or revocation of teaching credentials. According to Okeke & Uwazurike (2016), workplace discipline

is not merely about the rigid observance of rules; rather, it emphasizes a cooperative environment where employees behave in an orderly manner, in line with reasonable expectations. This study will be conducted in secondary schools within the Walemera Cluster of Nkhotakota District, where the researcher has personally observed and experienced instances of gender-based unfair treatment, particularly involving interactions with head teachers of the opposite sex.

A study done by Olufunke and Abimbola (2018) found a significant relationship between head teachers' gender-related characteristics and their effectiveness in maintaining teachers' discipline. The study highlighted that head teachers who exhibit masculine traits, regardless of their own gender, tend to be more successful in managing discipline. This includes characteristics such as assertiveness, thoroughness, friendliness, toughness, and courage. Similarly, Matheri, Cheloti, and Mulwa (2015) found that the gender of head teachers significantly affects their effectiveness in managing discipline in schools. However, these studies did not address the influence of gender dynamics between the head teacher and the teacher involved in disciplinary cases, nor how these dynamics affect decision-making and outcomes.

Studies by Yekha (2020) and Burton (2021) suggest that leadership qualities are not inherently tied to gender, with both male and female leaders demonstrating the capacity to implement change and achieve organizational goals. However, these studies focused more on general leadership rather than on the specific challenges posed by disciplinary issues. There remains a gap in the literature regarding the impact of gender dynamics on decision-making in disciplinary cases, particularly in the context of secondary schools in Malawi. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the role of gender in the handling of teacher discipline and its potential influence on decision-making and outcomes in secondary schools.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

There are growing concerns regarding potential disparities in the handling of disciplinary cases within the education system, particularly when gender dynamics between head teachers and teachers of the opposite sex are involved. These concerns suggest possible inconsistencies or biases in the application of professional codes of conduct, raising questions about fairness, accountability, and the overall integrity of disciplinary procedures. This has raised concerns about whether gender influences the decisions made in such cases and the subsequent outcomes. It is essential that disciplinary procedures in educational institutions are fair and equitable, regardless of the gender of the individuals involved (Nkhoma & Chilenga, 2019).

Gender dynamics within educational institutions have long been a source of concern, particularly in relation to equity, fairness, and professional conduct. However, limited research has been conducted on the specific issue of how school head teachers navigate disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. This gap in the literature, especially in the Malawian context, necessitates an investigation into the factors that influence decision-making in these cases and the broader implications for the educational environment.

Given the importance of fairness and consistency in school management, this study aims to explore how gender influences the handling of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. The findings of this research will contribute to the development of more equitable and effective disciplinary procedures within secondary schools. By examining the gender dynamics at play, the study will provide valuable insights into how disciplinary cases can be managed in a way that ensures fairness, consistency, and professionalism.

1.3 Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the head teachers' management of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in secondary schools.

1.4 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To assess the nature of disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools.
- To evaluate the procedures and approaches employed in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools.
- To analyze teachers' perceptions regarding how head teachers manage disciplinary cases, particularly those involving teachers of the opposite sex.
- To examine the challenges that head teachers encounter when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the nature of disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools, the extent to which head teachers comply with disciplinary procedures, and the challenges they face in managing such cases, particularly when they involve teachers of the opposite sex. The findings from this study are expected to contribute to practical recommendations for policy formulation and strategic planning, aimed at addressing issues of social injustice within public decision-making in the education sector.

Furthermore, this study addresses a specific aspect of school discipline that has received limited scholarly attention in Malawi. By analyzing how gender influences leadership decisions and

disciplinary actions, this study will contribute to broader discussions on gender equity in education management. The insights gained will help foster transparency, fairness, and equality in disciplinary procedures, ultimately reducing social injustices and promoting rational decision-making among school leaders.

1.6 Theoretical Framework for the Study.

This study was grounded in **Role Theory**, a concept developed by scholars such as Ralph Linton in sociology and George Herbert Mead in social psychology. The modern articulation of role theory was formalized in the 1920s (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). Role theory provides a foundational framework for analyzing how individuals within a society or organizational structure occupy and perform various roles. These roles encompass expectations, norms, and behaviours linked to specific positions, thereby shaping social interactions and institutional functions (Role theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals occupy and perform various roles within a society or organizational structure. These roles encompass expectations, norms, and behaviors linked to specific positions, thereby shaping social interactions and institutional functions (Kruger & Serpell, 2010).

Role theory posits that individuals assume multiple roles in different contexts, each defined by a set of expectations that influence behaviour, attitudes, and interactions (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). This study employed role theory to examine the expectations placed on head teachers in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex, shedding light on both societal and institutional perceptions of their responsibilities.

One of the key concept within role theory is **role expectations**, which pertains to the prescribed duties and behaviours expected of individuals in a given position (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). For head teachers, these expectations involve maintaining discipline, ensuring fairness, and upholding professional standards while managing disciplinary cases involving gender-related considerations.

Another critical component is **role conflict**, which occurs when head teachers encounter competing demands in disciplinary scenarios. They must balance their authoritative role in enforcing discipline while addressing gender-related sensitivities. Role theory helped to identify the sources of these conflicts and the strategies used to mitigate them (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017).

Additionally, **role performance** was central to this study, as it assessed whether head teachers' actions align with institutional expectations and prescribed behavioural norms. Through this lens, the study explored whether head teachers conform to or deviate from established disciplinary procedures when handling cases involving teachers of the opposite sex.

The concept of **role set** is also pertinent, as head teachers operate within a network of relationships involving both teachers and students. When addressing disciplinary cases, they must navigate potentially conflicting expectations from different stakeholders. Role theory provides insights into how these interactions influence decision-making and disciplinary outcomes (Callero, 2003).

Furthermore, **gender roles** played a significant role in this study, as disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex may be influenced by societal gender norms and stereotypes. Role theory helped in examining how these norms shape expectations regarding head teachers' decision-making and behaviour in disciplinary proceedings (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017).

By applying role theory, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how head teachers manage disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. It explored the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ to balance various role expectations, and the broader implications of these dynamics within educational institutions. This theoretical framework thus offers valuable insights into the interplay between professional roles, institutional expectations, and gender dynamics in school administration.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations of the Study.

This study ventured into public decision-making in disciplinary management by secondary school head teachers in disciplinary matters involving teachers of the opposite sex. The study focused on assessing the nature of disciplinary cases, analyzing how disciplinary cases involving teachers were handled, scrutinizing the perceptions of teachers on how head teachers handled disciplinary cases, especially those involving teachers of the opposite sex, and examining the challenges faced by head teachers in handling disciplinary matters involving teachers of the opposite sex in secondary schools.

The study was conducted in one district and one cluster only, which was not a full representation of secondary schools in the country. Hence, the findings were not generalized but were only used contextually. On the same note, some participants were reluctant and misreported some of the information related to the effectiveness and efficiency of how they performed their work to avoid implicating themselves. Other head teachers were also reluctant to provide the researcher with some documents related to teacher indiscipline due to fear of the unknown. As a result, important information might have been missed, which could have affected the outcome of the study.

1.8 Conclusion.

This chapter established the foundation of the study by examining the role of gender in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in Malawian secondary schools. It highlighted the complexities of school discipline, emphasizing the need for fairness, transparency, and professionalism to ensure institutional integrity. The study's objectives focus on disciplinary case management, teachers' perceptions, and challenges faced by head teachers, aligning with the broader goal of fostering gender-sensitive disciplinary practices. Role Theory was adopted as the guiding framework to explore role expectations, conflicts, and decision-making processes. The chapter also underscored the study's significance in shaping policy, leadership training, and gender equity in educational management while acknowledging contextual limitations. The next chapter presents a literature review analyzing related studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction.

This chapter focuses on a review of related literature in the context of the study. It focuses on; indiscipline among teachers in secondary schools, the causes of indiscipline among teachers, challenges faced in the management of the cases, effective management of the cases, gender dynamics in handling teacher indiscipline and coping strategies in dealing with gender dynamics in handling teacher indiscipline.

2.1 Nature of Indiscipline among Teachers in Secondary Schools.

Teacher indiscipline is a phenomenon that has ravaged global attention. In most education systems across the globe, many teachers are particularly involved in professional misconducts, which are against their ethical obligations (Gahungu, 2018). Indiscipline is an action considered wrong and not generally accepted as proper in a society, (Okebiro, 2016). In this study, indiscipline means any act, behaviour, or performance by a teacher that is contrary to approved code of conduct. Teacher indiscipline is therefore conceptualized as any act, behaviour or performance of a teacher that is contrary to approved rules and regulations or the teachers' code of conduct.

Teacher indiscipline is a global concern that affects educational systems worldwide. It encompasses various forms of misconduct and challenges in the management of teacher behaviour. Teacher indiscipline in Europe involve issues such as political activism, teacher strikes, and challenges to educational policies (Horn, 2019). According to Smith (2020) in North America, teacher indiscipline ranges from misconduct in the classroom to ethical violations.

In Africa, similar unethical practices are common. In Kenya, Ndung'u (2017) cited lateness, corruption, negligence of duty and engaging in sexual relationships with students as very common among teachers. The same was noted in Tanzania where some teachers were involved in sexual violence, disobedience to the dressing code and absenteeism (Ndibalema, 2019). In Zambia, Walubita (2015) cited various offences, which were committed by teachers such as flirting with female learners, reporting late and drunk for work, engaging in illegal class enrolments and obtaining money from pupils for preferential treatment as well as leaking examination content. Similarly, Kaponda et.al (2021) postulated that some teachers are fond of irresponsible beer drinking, drug abuse, engaging in sexual relationships especially with female pupils including touching their breasts, buttocks and impregnating them, disorderly behaviour, absconding from work, lateness, stealing school properties as well as using abusive language in addition to being quarrelsome. In Malawi, a study by Chirwa (2014) found that the common cases of teacher misconduct in secondary schools are unauthorized absenteeism, and late coming.

The literature effectively discusses the issue of teacher indiscipline globally, regionally, and locally, aligning with the study's focus on disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools. It categorizes various forms of teacher misconduct, such as lateness, absenteeism, corruption, unethical relationships, and substance abuse, which are key concerns for disciplinary management in schools.

2.1.1 Causes of Indiscipline among Teachers in Secondary Schools.

Understanding the factors that make teachers to become indiscipline in schools is important in maintaining school discipline (MoE, 2005). Indiscipline among teachers in schools are influenced by different factors as supported by different studies. Studies by Urick (2016) & Wenno (2017) revealed that lack of collaboration in the management of the school contributes to teacher indiscipline as teachers are considered as intruders. On the same, poor school leadership, inadequate communication from administrators and lack of support can create a negative school environment. When teachers perceive administrative issues, it can lead to indiscipline as a response to frustration (Galloway, 2016). According to Smith (2015) poor working conditions, including lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and dilapidated infrastructure, can lead to teacher indiscipline. Such conditions can reduce job satisfaction and motivation.

In continuation, a study by Chirwa (2014) found that the possible causes of teacher misconduct are factors related to low job satisfaction, negligence, limited knowledge of the Teachers' Code of Conduct, minimal support from authorities and lack of cooperation among teachers. The study revealed that teachers were dissatisfied with lack of promotions and low salaries. This situation can result in teachers concentrating on secondary activities than actual teaching to supplement their incomes. The study also revealed existence of little or no support in terms of school supervision, a situation that can lead to feelings of relaxation among some teachers. Similarly, another study by Elifala (2020) revealed that the major factors that make teachers to become indiscipline in Secondary Schools are poor family background, drug and substance abuse, poor work environment, health related problems, partiality by authorities, long stay at the school, working at a home school and poor working conditions. However, these studies overlooked an

element of gender dynamics in school management as a one of the factors contributing to teacher indiscipline.

Indiscipline among teachers in secondary schools can be caused by a combination of factors, including stress, lack of professional development, administrative issues, workload, working conditions, and personal challenges. Addressing these underlying causes is essential to create a more supportive and conducive work environment for teacher. However, it is of great importance to fetch for more root causes in order to minimize or completely eradicate teacher indiscipline.

2.1.2 Challenges Faced in the Management of Teacher Indiscipline in Secondary Schools.

Teacher indiscipline in secondary schools is a critical issue that can have significant consequences for the quality of education and the overall learning environment. It is essential to understand the challenges involved in managing teacher indiscipline to develop effective strategies for addressing this problem.

One of the challenges faced in teacher indiscipline management is gender dynamics. A study by Smith (2017) found that preconceived gender stereotypes affect the handling of teacher indiscipline. For instance, female teachers may be perceived as less authoritative, leading to different expectations and consequences for their behaviour. Gender can also intersect with power dynamics in schools. Male teachers may hold positions of authority more frequently, potentially influencing how cases of teacher indiscipline are addressed. Another study by Brown (2020) postulated that gender dynamics can affect reporting and whistleblowing regarding teacher indiscipline. Female teachers may be less likely to report male colleagues due to fear of retaliation or social stigma, leading to underreporting of misconduct. These issue needs undivided attention

but most scholarly show minimal attention to pursue this element in regards to management of teacher indiscipline.

In addition, a study by Kaponda et al. (2021a) established that the bureaucratic nature of educational systems could create obstacles in addressing teacher indiscipline. Swift disciplinary procedures have higher chances of bringing effective results to involved suspect teachers. However, due to the nature of the Malawian disciplinary procedures where decisions such as suspension, interdiction are not at the head teacher's level and are supposed to be referred to higher authorities for consideration for action. The process takes too long time before considering such decisions and therefore, the impact is that the involved teachers may not appreciate the aim of the disciplinary action (Dzimbiri, 2016). Similarly, according to Brown (2019), lengthy investigation processes and red tape also delay the resolution of cases, leaving the issue unaddressed for extended periods. Due to delays, some heads opt for shortcuts, which deviates from professionalism. A study by Magwa (2014) observed that some head teachers avoid the longer and complicated route of charging teachers and instead, opt for simpler actions like verbal warnings and requesting for transfer of teachers. In contrast, these studies did not address the issue of gender or sex of the head teacher, the teacher(s) involved and its impact on the duration of the case(s) to be resolved.

Furthermore, a study by Tshabalala, Zano, and Gazimbe (2014a) found that many head teachers in lack the necessary expertise of handling disciplinary procedures, where however, it was discovered that some school head teachers abused their authority and charged teachers even for minor offences to settle scores on non-professional issues. Their study concurred with the study by Smith (2016), which found that some school administrators often lack the necessary training

and skills to handle cases of teacher indiscipline appropriately. This lack of training can lead to mismanagement of incidents and can contribute to a culture of impunity. Another study by Jones (2020) opined that lack of a culture of accountability in some educational institutions could make it difficult to hold teachers accountable for their actions. This can contribute to the perpetuation of teacher indiscipline. Nevertheless, these studies overlooked the element of gender and willingness to gain more knowledge and seek assistance from others to ensure fairness in the management of teacher indiscipline.

Finally, the study by Evans (2015) observed that managing teacher indiscipline is often hindered by the absence of clear policies and guidelines. Without specific rules and procedures, it becomes challenging school administrators to address instances of teacher indiscipline effectively. Sometimes, teachers may be reluctant to report incidents of teacher indiscipline due to fear of retaliation or harm to their professional reputation. This fear can deter them from seeking assistance from school authorities (Glover, 2018). To add on, Kaponda et al. (2021b) discussed that some teachers simply ignore the rules and regulations deliberately. In this regard, some teachers see indiscipline acts as normal, and as such, they continue to misconduct knowingly. Sometimes, this is due to teacher's negative mentality, ignorance and non-reading of the code of ethics. In addition, Chirwa (2014) revealed that some of the challenges faced in the promotion of ethical conduct were misconceptions of human rights and lack of resources to investigate cases of misconduct and organize sensitization campaigns. Some teachers cause problems, as they do not differentiate their rights from responsibilities. In some cases, schools may face resource constraints in addressing teacher indiscipline. This includes limited funding for investigations, training, and legal support, making it challenging to manage cases effectively (Davis, 2017). Policies and

guidelines need to be clear to both the head(s) and teachers alike to ensure that there is fairness and justice in the management of teacher misconduct.

The literature effectively outlines key challenges in managing teacher indiscipline, which directly aligns with the study's objective of analyzing procedures and approaches used by head teachers in handling disciplinary cases. It highlights bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of training for head teachers, absence of clear policies, and resource constraints as major obstacles, which are all relevant to the study. While the literature mentions gender dynamics, it does not explore whether the gender of the head teacher affects how disciplinary cases are handled. There is no discussion on whether male and female head teachers adopt different approaches in disciplining teachers, or if gender influences the severity of disciplinary actions. Since the study aims to explore disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex, this aspect needs further exploration.

2.1.3 Effective Management of Teacher Indiscipline in Secondary Schools.

Teacher indiscipline in secondary schools is a critical issue that requires effective management in order to maintain a positive teaching and learning environment.

Effective management of teacher indiscipline begins with the establishment of clear policies and guidelines. These documents define expected teacher behaviour and the consequences of violating these standards (Evans, 2015). Smith (2016) proposed provision of ongoing professional development to teachers as a proactive strategy in managing indiscipline. Training and workshops can help teachers acquire better classroom management skills and understand their professional responsibilities. A study by Davis (2019) emphasized about professionalism on the part of head teachers as addressing teacher indiscipline involves navigating legal and ethical complexities.

Schools must adhere to legal requirements and ethical principles when handling such cases. Teachers need to frequently be reminded of the teachers' code of conduct, their effort need to be recognized and that head teachers need to undergo trainings on leadership and management and be exemplary in the way they conduct themselves, (Kaponda et al., 2021a). A study by Brown (2018) postulated that schools should have effective conflict resolution mechanisms in place. Mediation and counseling can help resolve disputes and misunderstandings between teachers, reducing the likelihood of indiscipline. It is likely for a head teacher who practices professionalism to provide a well informed decision on management of teacher indiscipline as they are aware of what is supposed to be done regardless of other elements like gender.

Furthermore, holding teachers accountable for their actions is crucial in order for them to have a sense of conscious and act accordingly. To add on, investigations disciplinary processes need to be transparent and fair to ensure that consequences for indiscipline are applied consistently (Jones, 2020). Similarly, offering support and counseling to teachers facing personal or professional challenges can be an effective management strategy. It helps teachers address the root causes of their indiscipline (Smith, 2017). According to Habib (2015) supervision of schools have a very strong impact on teacher discipline and attendance. In this regard, Adewale et al. (2014) defined supervision as the various activities engaged in by individuals, or groups for the purpose of achievement of goals and objectives of groups or organizations. Thus, Habib (2015) explained that supervision is meant to provide guidance; support and continuous assessment to teachers in order to enable them develop professionally and improve their teaching pedagogy. Gangmei, Gowramma and Kumar (2019) explained that, in order to realize effective management of good discipline among teachers, both the head teacher and teacher leadership is important. The scholars argues that teachers and head teachers need to collaborate in combating teacher misconduct not

doing it alone. These views are similar to those of Urick (2016) who noted that effective school leadership is the degree of influence or synergy between teachers and head teachers around the core business of schools' instruction. To combat teacher indiscipline, it is important to involve every staff member in the activities of the school and allow their views and opinions be heard so that they feel to be part of the institution. A sense of belonging have a capability of motivating teachers to act accordingly and professionally.

The literature review correctly emphasized strategies for managing teacher indiscipline, which aligns with the study's objective of exploring effective disciplinary approaches in secondary schools. Key elements such as clear policies, professional development, supervision, accountability, and conflict resolution are relevant to the study. On the contrary, the review mentions professionalism and leadership as critical in handling teacher misconduct but does not discuss whether gender influences disciplinary decision-making. The literature does not explore how cultural beliefs and societal norms shape teacher discipline. The review assumes that clear policies and training automatically lead to better discipline, but it does not address teacher resistance to disciplinary measures and conflicts between teachers and administrators over disciplinary actions. Some teachers may view disciplinary measures as unfair, gender motivated, or overly punitive, leading to further resistance. The literature highlights the need for clear policies but does not explore how well existing policies are enforced, whether schools have the authority and resources to implement disciplinary actions and legal challenges or loopholes that make it difficult to discipline teachers.

2.2 Gender Dynamics in Handling Teacher Indiscipline in Secondary Schools.

The issue of teacher indiscipline in secondary schools is influenced by various factors, including gender dynamics. Understanding how gender plays a role in the handling of teacher indiscipline is essential to ensure that disciplinary actions are unbiased, fair and just.

Research has shown that there is often a gender bias in the way teacher indiscipline is addressed. Female teachers may face harsher consequences and greater scrutiny for similar infractions compared to their male counterparts (Anderson, 2018). A study by Smith (2017) found that preconceived gender stereotypes affect the handling of teacher indiscipline. For instance, female teachers may be perceived as less authoritative, leading to different expectations and consequences for their behavior. Gender can also intersect with power dynamics in schools. Male teachers may hold positions of authority more frequently, potentially influencing how cases of teacher indiscipline are addressed. This can lead to inequalities in disciplinary actions (Johnson, 2019). Another study by Brown (2020) postulated that gender dynamics can affect reporting and whistleblowing regarding teacher indiscipline. Female teachers may be less likely to report male colleagues due to fear of retaliation or social stigma, leading to underreporting of misconduct. Finally, societal and cultural norms can also affect the handling of teacher indiscipline based on gender. In some cultures, specific gender roles and expectations may influence the response to misconduct, leading to biased disciplinary actions (Martinez, 2016b).

The literature effectively establishes that gender influences how teacher indiscipline is managed, which aligns with the study's focus on fair and just disciplinary processes. The literature relies on general claims about gender biases in discipline but lacks concrete examples or case studies that demonstrate these biases in action.

Including data from schools or disciplinary cases would provide stronger empirical support. The literature identifies gender bias in disciplinary processes but does not explore whether schools or policymakers have attempted to address these issues.

2.2.1 Coping Strategies in Dealing with Gender Dynamics in Handling Teacher Indiscipline.

Managing teacher indiscipline in secondary schools while considering gender dynamics is a complex task that requires effective coping strategies. The strategies to be narrated might help school administrators address challenges when addressing gender-related issues in the context of teacher indiscipline.

To begin with, in order to handle teacher indiscipline professionally, it is important to implement and enforce gender-neutral disciplinary policies and procedures as a fundamental coping strategy. According to Brewster (2016), these policies should be applied uniformly regardless of gender to ensure fairness. Head teachers should ensure that their decisions and actions are free from gender bias or stereotyping. Equity and fairness should be maintained at all costs (Smith, 2018). Similarly, it is crucial to establish clear guidelines for addressing teacher indiscipline, irrespective of the genders involved. These guidelines can include reporting procedures, investigation processes, and disciplinary measures (Smith, 2017). According to a study by Brown (2018) promoting gender sensitivity in handling cases of teacher indiscipline involving teachers of the opposite sex is a crucial coping strategy. Schools heads either male or female need to abide by the rules and regulations of dealing with teacher misconduct regardless of the gender of those involved. Gender equity and equality need not to be overlooked when addressing teacher misconducts in schools for just and fair decisions.

Secondly, effective communication is key in professional case handling. According to Brown (2019), head teachers should maintain clear, respectful, and professional communication throughout the process, ensuring that teachers are heard and their concerns addressed regardless of their gender or sex. Effective communication allows for constructive discussions and problem solving. Teachers can express their perspectives and concerns, and administrators can work collaboratively with them to find solutions. Effective communication facilitates conflict resolution and collaboration. Davis (2018) postulated that open dialogue allows for the identification of underlying issues, making it possible to address concerns and find solutions collaboratively. Similarly, open and honest dialogue can help identify the root causes of issues and facilitate the resolution of disputes in a non-confrontational manner.

Effective communication is the linchpin of professional case handling involving secondary school teachers. It facilitates understanding, trust, and collaboration while upholding the principles of fairness, respect, and transparency in the process (Brown, 2019). Open communication helps preserve professional relationships between administrators and teachers. When communication is respectful and empathetic, it is more likely that teachers will accept feedback and work towards improvement (Garcia, 2017). Both male and female teachers need to be given equal chances to be heard in order to find a lasting solution to the issue(s) at hand, make sure that everyone involved is satisfied to prevent future occurrences.

Furthermore, providing gender sensitivity training for school administrators and staff is crucial. This training helps create awareness and understanding of gender dynamics and ensures that disciplinary actions are carried out with sensitivity. According to Smith (2018), training administrators and staff to be sensitive to gender-related issues can help ensure equitable treatment.

Head teachers should undergo such training to gain a better understanding of the unique challenges and perspectives of teachers, thereby avoiding gender bias and stereotypes. Gender sensitivity training emphasizes the importance of fair and consistent disciplinary measures. Administrators are better equipped to handle teacher indiscipline cases without being swayed by gender-related stereotypes, ensuring that disciplinary actions are proportionate and just, (Lott & Maluso, 2015). Similarly, according to Kalra & Sharma (2020), gender sensitivity training equips school administrators to recognize and appropriately address cases of gender-based harassment among teachers. This is crucial for creating a safe and supportive working environment for all staff members. Gender sensitivity training for school administrators and staff plays a crucial role in addressing teacher indiscipline by promoting awareness, improving communication, addressing harassment, implementing fair disciplinary measures, creating inclusive policies, and fostering a positive school culture. All heads and teachers need to be given equal access to knowledge on gender sensitivity for them to be aware of what is expected of them.

Finally, incorporating conflict resolution and mediation processes is a valuable coping strategy. These techniques provide a structured and impartial platform for resolving disputes and misunderstandings among teachers, minimizing the impact of gender dynamics (Anderson, 2020). According to Folger & Bush (2014), addressing conflicts through mediation allows for the identification and resolution of underlying issues. This proactive approach helps in reducing the likelihood of recurrence and promotes a healthier organizational culture. Generally, incorporating conflict resolution and mediation processes in handling teacher indiscipline in secondary schools is essential for promoting positive relationships, fostering effective communication, and achieving efficient and cost-effective resolutions, (Moore, 2014). These processes contribute to a healthier school climate and support the overall well-being of the educational community. Conflict

resolution and mediation processes need to be fair and just regardless of the gender of those involved.

Coping strategies are vital in managing teacher indiscipline cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. Clear guidelines, gender sensitivity, privacy measures, conflict resolution, and administrator training are essential to address challenges effectively while maintaining fairness and professionalism.

2.3. Conclusion.

In summary, the literature review in this study has explored significant and relevant sources on the management of teacher indiscipline, with a particular focus on the influence of gender dynamics. The chapter has provided an overview of how teacher indiscipline is managed, highlighting the ways in which gender dynamics shape decision-making processes in this context. The review reveals that teacher indiscipline is a global issue, characterized by common themes such as various forms of misconduct, difficulties in reporting incidents, institutional responses, legal implications, and the role of professional development in addressing these challenges. Additionally, it has examined the intersectionality of gender and its impact on the perception and handling of indiscipline among teachers, which is often influenced by societal norms and expectations. Understanding these global and gendered perspectives on teacher indiscipline is crucial for developing strategies that are more effective, policies, and practices that can mitigate the issue and promote a more just and inclusive educational environment. The next chapter describes methodology and methods that were used for collecting and analyzing data.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter describes the methodology. Methodology refers to the systematic plan or approach that a researcher follows to conduct their study. It outlines the procedures, techniques, and tools used to gather, analyze, and interpret data. The methodology ensures that the research is conducted in a structured and scientific manner, allowing for reproducibility and credibility (Clark et al., 2021).

3.1 Interpretivism Research Paradigm

The focus of the research was to capture individualized points of view from different head teachers and teachers in selected secondary schools on the management of teacher indiscipline, especially those that involves teachers of the opposite sex to the head teacher in charge. Hence, the study adopted interpretivism as the research paradigm. According to Creswell (2018), interpretivism is based on the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. That is to say, we can only understand someone's reality through their experience of that reality, which may differ from another person's, shaped by the individuals' historical or social perspectives. Interpretivism acknowledged that individuals have unique and subjective interpretations of the world. For instance, head teachers handling disciplinary cases brought their own values, beliefs, and interpretations to the situations.

3.2 Research approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach because its focus was to explore head teachers' and teacher's lived experiences. The choice of a qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to explore and understand the management of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in a holistic and in-depth manner, considering the complex, context-specific, and nuanced nature of the research topic (Creswell, 2014).

3.3 Case Study Research Design

The research employed a case study approach to investigate thoroughly the handling of disciplinary cases within specific schools. Each case provided rich, context-specific data. Case studies enabled the researcher to explore in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014). Case studies allowed for an in-depth exploration of specific instances or cases, providing a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon. This approach enabled the researcher to gain rich insights and detailed information (Yin, 2018). With case studies, it was possible to gain a unique perspective of an individual or group (Denscombe, 2021).

The study adopted a case study because it focused on teachers and head teachers of both sexes in secondary schools under Walemera cluster. Handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex was a complex and sensitive matter. Case studies helped uncover the intricacies, nuances, and challenges that head teachers faced when dealing with such cases. It allowed the researcher to delve into the underlying issues and factors contributing to decision-making. Hence, it was the design worth using in the research.

3.4 Research Site

The study was conducted in secondary schools under Walemera cluster in Nkhotakota district, which is in the Central East Education Division (CEED). Walemera cluster was chosen because of the researcher's experience and observation as a teacher on how different cases of teacher indiscipline had been handled, especially those involving teachers of the opposite sex with the head teachers in charge. This prompted the researcher to explore whether gender dynamics influenced public decision-making, particularly in secondary schools. Therefore, the district was purposively chosen because of its cultural factors that might have influenced how disciplinary cases were handled, especially those involving the opposite sex.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The participants in this study were purposively sampled to gather rich information on the topic under study. Purposeful sampling involved selecting participants based on their expertise or experience related to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher purposively sampled female and male-headed schools to capture the intricacies, nuances, and challenges they faced when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. In the selected schools, two female-headed schools and one male-headed school was sampled. In these schools three male teachers one from each school and three female teachers were sampled based on experience and involvement in disciplinary cases. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to gather in-depth insights from individuals with direct experience and knowledge. The study involved nine participants and sample size was guided by the saturation point.

3.6 Methods and Tools for Data Collection

The research used in-depth interviews as one of the method for collecting data. One-on-one interviews with head teachers and teachers were conducted to collect data. Interview guides (appendices B and C) with open-ended questions was used to explore their experiences, perspectives, and decision-making processes in disciplinary cases, especially those involving the opposite sex (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). An audio recorder and notepad were also used during interviews to record and take notes of participants' responses for reference during data analysis.

Documentary analysis was also used as a method and a tool for collecting data. In the context of the study, the researcher gathered documents and records such as school policies, disciplinary records and written communications related to disciplinary cases involving teachers. Documentary analysis in this study was guided by several key principles to ensure its effectiveness and integrity as a research method. The documents selected were directly relevant to the study's objectives, particularly concerning the management of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. Emphasis was placed on the authenticity and credibility of the sources to maintain trustworthiness. The content of the documents was systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and institutional practices. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the procedures and social meanings embedded within the documents. Furthermore, documentary analysis served as a tool for triangulating data with in-depth interviews, enhancing the reliability of findings. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and the responsible handling of sensitive information, were strictly adhered to. This aligns with the view that documentary analysis

provides a rich, contextual understanding of institutional processes when applied with rigour and ethical sensitivity (Bowen, 2009).

3.7 Data Analysis

The recorded responses were analyzed thematically, firstly by transcription. The researcher ensured accuracy in transcription, including capturing verbal cues and non-verbal elements. The researcher then familiarized himself with the transcribed content before coding. Open coding then followed by generating initial codes that represented concepts, ideas, and patterns found in the interview transcripts. Then the initial codes were organized into broader categories or themes, and the coded data within and across interviews were continuously compared and contrasted. By assigning codes to data items, researchers could quickly identify patterns and trends that would otherwise be difficult to detect hence able to come up with the themes (Gibbs, 2007). The researcher came up with the themes by identifying patterns and variations in how head teachers handled disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. Finally, documentary analysis was conducted to complement data collected through the interviews. Documents such as school policies and disciplinary records involving teachers were analyzed.

The research adopted thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. It involves a systematic process of coding and theme development, allowing researchers to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were stored/backed up using both manual and computerized devices, with adequate security measures in place to guard against unauthorized access. Obsolete and irrelevant data were destroyed or shredded using both manual and

computerized techniques, depending on the nature of the data and the implications of unauthorized access to such data.

3.8 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher focused on four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2018). Credibility was established through strategies such as triangulation of data sources and member checks, which enhanced the authenticity and believability of the findings. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextual descriptions of the research setting and participants, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was supported by maintaining consistency in data collection, even amidst changes in the research environment, and through conducting a pre-analysis data audit. Confirmability was achieved by ensuring that findings were grounded in the data, using systematic coding and continuous reflection throughout the research process. The use of both interviews and documentary analysis helped triangulate findings, strengthening the study's overall integrity and enhancing confidence in its conclusions (Creswell, 2018).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In respect of the legal framework of research policies or ethical issues, the researcher sought ethical clearance from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to conduct the study (appendix D). Permission was sought from the Education Division Manager of the Central East Education Division (appendix E) and the head teachers of the schools proposed to participate in the study for the researcher to be allowed to collect data. Informed consent was sought from the head teachers and teachers of the proposed schools as participants of the study. Informed consent

referred to a principle that prospective participants in research must be given sufficient advance information about what is involved to make an informed choice about participation (Robson, 2011).

Through this approach, respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the need for respect of their privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. All names of the participants and their schools were represented with pseudonyms throughout the study in accordance with the standard requirements of Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC). Respondents were also informed that participation was voluntary. Those who accepted to take part signed the consent forms before participating in the study.

3.10 Conclusion

The research employed a rigorous qualitative approach to explore the handling of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm and a case study design, the study provided an in-depth, context-specific understanding of the lived experiences of head teachers in managing such cases. The use of purposeful sampling ensured that participants with direct experience and knowledge contributed valuable insights, while in-depth interviews and documentary analysis facilitated the collection of rich and comprehensive data.

Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of patterns and trends in disciplinary decision-making, enhancing the study's depth and credibility. Efforts to ensure reliability, validity, and ethical integrity, such as triangulation, member checking, and adherence to research ethics, further strengthened the study's trustworthiness. Overall, this methodological approach enabled a nuanced examination of gender dynamics in disciplinary processes, shedding light on potential biases and

inconsistencies while maintaining academic rigour and ethical responsibility. The next chapter is about data analysis and discussion where the findings were analyzed through thematic analysis guided by Role theoretical framework under interpretivism paradigm philosophical assumption.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings through thematic analysis representing data regarding the handling of discipline cases involving the teachers of the opposite sex by head teachers in selected secondary schools in Walemera cluster located in Nkhotakota district. Each themes guided by Role theoretical framework under Interpretivism paradigm philosophical assumption.

This chapter purports to present the findings of the study as observed from the analyzed data. The analysis and discussion of the findings were structured according to the specific objectives of the study. The objective are; to assess the nature of disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools and evaluate the procedures and approaches employed in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools. In addition, analyze teachers' perceptions regarding how head teachers manage disciplinary cases, particularly those involving teachers of the opposite sex and examine the challenges that head teachers encounter when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex.

4.2 Nature of Disciplinary Cases

The study established that disciplinary cases in secondary schools take various forms. The most common forms of teacher misconduct reported by head teachers include late coming, absenteeism, reporting to work while intoxicated, inappropriate dressing, and ill-lesson preparation. Some head teachers also reported cases of inappropriate relationships between teachers and students, as well as conflicts arising from teacher interactions.

Head Teacher C of School Z stated:

"One of the indiscipline that takes place is frequent absenteeism mostly on the side of female teachers due to copycat behaviour from fellow workers like if one is absent today then I will be absent tomorrow. The other one is the issue of dating among teachers which by the end of the day brings confusion, the other one is the issue of dressing which is not in line with the dressing code demanded by the ministry of education and this also affects how the students also dress because they also copy how the teachers dress."

These findings align with previous studies by Kaponda et al. (2021), who identified lateness, absenteeism, and inappropriate teacher-student relationships as prevalent issues in Malawian schools. This also aligns with existing study, which suggests that absenteeism and late coming is common among teachers in Malawi (Chirwa, 2014).

From a role theory perspective, the patterns observed in disciplinary cases reflect the influence of socially constructed gender roles on teachers' behaviours. Head teachers reported that male teachers were more frequently involved in misconduct such as reporting for work under the influence of alcohol, particularly toward the end of the month—a behaviour potentially linked to societal expectations around masculinity and social habits. In contrast, female teachers were more often absent due to personal or family responsibilities, aligning with traditional gender roles that place caregiving and domestic duties on women. These behavioural patterns suggest that the

expectations and social norms associated with gendered roles within and beyond the school environment may significantly shape how disciplinary issues manifest and are perceived.

Head Teacher A of School X observed:

"Most male teachers report at work drunk mostly during month ends while

female teachers report late at work because they have small children."

On the same, **Head Teacher B of School Y** also said:

"One of the common indiscipline that I have observed so far as a head teacher

is abscondment of work mostly male teachers due to the gender of the leader."

The findings underscore how socially constructed gender roles influence interactions and authority within institutional settings. According to Mbilizi (2008), male teachers may resist authority when female leaders, a behaviour rooted in entrenched patriarchal norms and expectations about gendered power dynamics, exercise it. This resistance presents significant challenges for female head teachers, whose leadership roles may be perceived as inconsistent with traditional male-dominated authority structures. Role Theory explains this tension because of conflicting role expectations—where female leaders occupy formal positions of authority, but are simultaneously constrained by societal norms that ascribe leadership and assertiveness predominantly to men. These dynamics are consistent with broader literature suggesting that gendered expectations shape professional conduct and influence how authority is accepted or challenged in workplace environments (Smith, 2020).

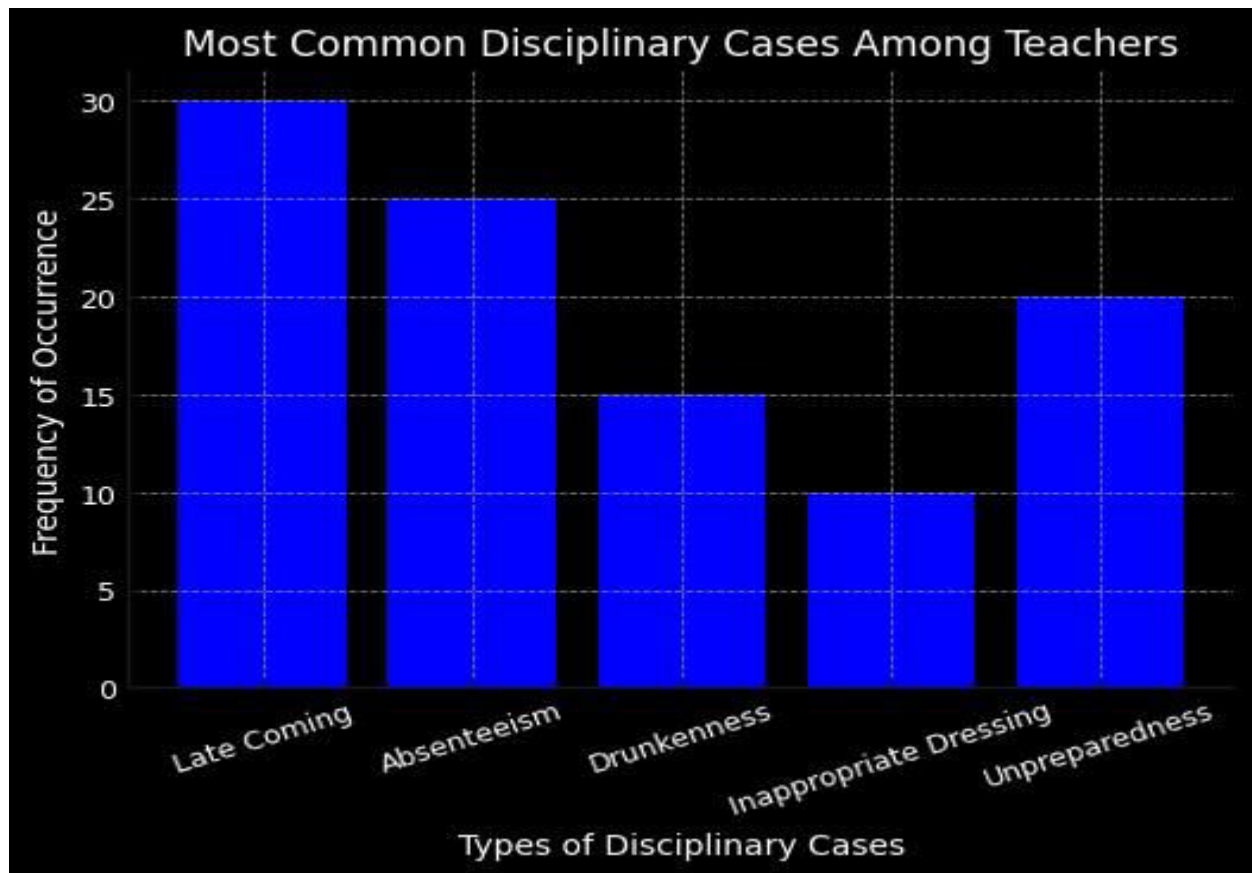


Figure 4.1: Bar graph showing the most common disciplinary cases among teachers.

The **figure 4.1** is a bar graph showing the most common disciplinary cases among teachers both females and males in general. The data suggests that late coming and absenteeism are the most significant concerns among teachers. Unpreparedness also poses a considerable challenge, indicating a lack of readiness for teaching responsibilities. Drunkenness and inappropriate dressing, though less frequent, still present disciplinary concerns. The next bar graph shows the comparison of disciplinary cases between male and female teachers.

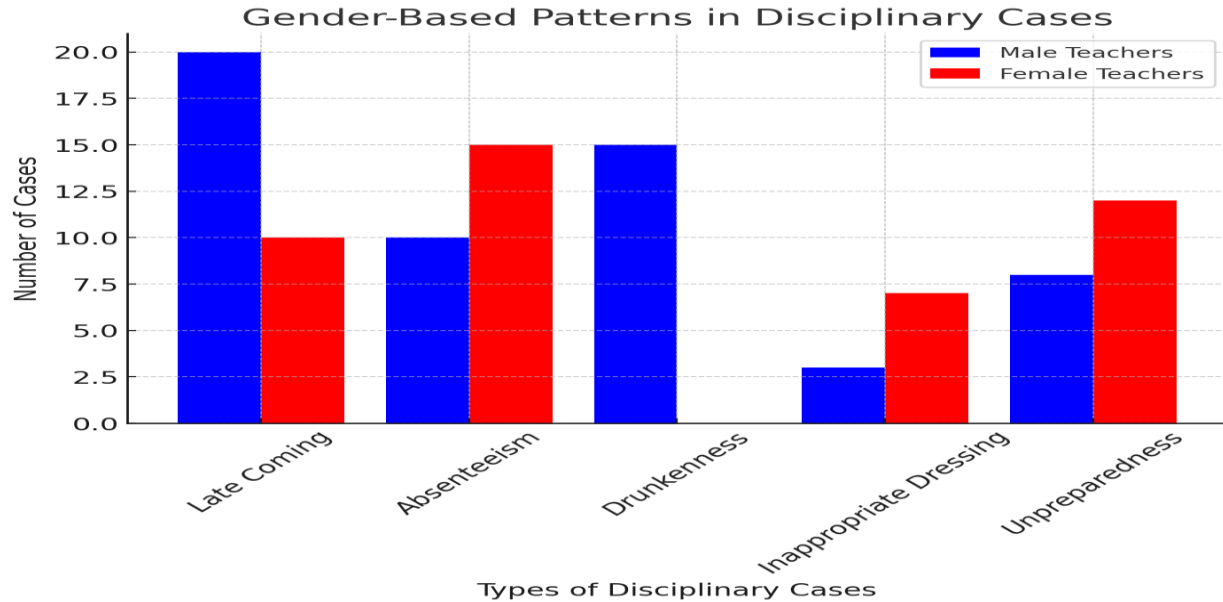


Figure 4.2: A bar graph comparing the frequency of different disciplinary cases among male and female teachers.

The **figure 4.2** is a bar graph titled illustrating the number of disciplinary cases among male and female teachers across different categories. Male teachers tend to have higher cases of late coming and are equally involved in drunkenness. Female teachers show higher cases in absenteeism, inappropriate dressing, and unpreparedness. Drunkenness is the only category where on male teachers are culprits. Late coming is the most common issue among male teachers, while absenteeism is the leading concern for female teachers. The data highlights different behavioural patterns in disciplinary cases between male and female teachers. It may help in formulating targeted interventions to address specific issues, such as stricter attendance policies and professional conduct guidelines.

4.3 Handling of Disciplinary Cases by Head Teachers

The study found out that head teachers employ various strategies in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers. The process generally involves; receiving reports from the deputy head teacher or disciplinary committee, conducting an initial hearing with the teacher involved, issuing verbal or written warnings for minor offenses and escalating severe or recurrent cases to the Education Division Manager (EDM) or law enforcement.

Head Teacher A of School X explained:

"Once the issue has reached me as the head teacher, firstly I call that Particular teacher who is suspected of committing an offence to hear from him or her as a first hearing to get his or her stand on the issue and counsel him or her. However, if he/she continues, the issue is taken to the discipline committee where he/she is asked why he/she is not changing and be advised to put in writing about the issue at hand."

From a **Role Theory** perspective, the inconsistencies observed in the enforcement of disciplinary actions reflect the complex and often conflicting expectations placed on head teachers. While their formal role demands upholding institutional standards through strict disciplinary procedures, their social and relational roles may call for empathy, discretion, and the preservation of staff morale. The study revealed that some head teachers prefer informal resolutions—such as personal counseling—over formal disciplinary actions, aiming to protect teachers' jobs and avoid the

bureaucratic escalation of cases. This application of compassion and flexibility illustrates how role expectations are negotiated in practice. Tshabalala, Zano, and Gazimbe (2014), who noted that head teachers often avoid formal processes due to bureaucratic burdens and considerations of humanity, support these findings.

Similarly, Mbilizi (2008) observed that school leaders tend to balance formal procedures with a flexible, people-centered approach. Chirwa (2019) reinforces this perspective by emphasizing the delicate balance head teachers must maintain—overly strict enforcement may result in the loss of skilled teachers, while excessive leniency could erode professional standards. Within Role Theory, such behavior illustrates how individuals interpret and adapt their roles to meet both institutional expectations and human needs. On the same, one of the key factor influencing decision-making was the availability of teachers. Some head teachers expressed reluctance to report cases to higher authorities due to the risk of teacher transfers, which could negatively affect staffing levels.

Head Teacher B of School Y expressed:

"Sometimes I fail to report indiscipline cases of teachers to the division because most of the times the education division managers resort to transferring the indiscipline teachers which might affect the teaching and learning as the number of teachers may reduce."

From a **Role Theory** perspective, the findings of Dzimbiri (2016) underscore how structural and contextual limitations can impede the effective fulfillment of the disciplinary role expected of school administrators. Role Theory suggests that individuals operate within a set of prescribed

expectations tied to their professional positions; however, when these expectations are not supported by adequate resources, clear guidelines, or institutional backing, role conflict and role strain can emerge. Dzimbiri (2016) found that ineffective discipline enforcement is often rooted in administrative constraints such as inadequate support, lack of clear policies, insufficient teacher training, and minimal parental involvement. These limitations hinder head teachers from executing their roles effectively, especially when they must navigate resource shortages, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inconsistent disciplinary frameworks. Such conditions create a mismatch between the idealized role of the head teacher as an enforcer of discipline and the reality of their constrained capacity, resulting in a breakdown of role performance and institutional function.

4.4 Perceptions of Teachers on Head Teachers' Handling of Disciplinary Cases

Teachers provided mixed feedback regarding how head teachers handle disciplinary cases, particularly those involving teachers of the opposite sex. Some teachers believed that female head teachers demonstrated bias in favour of female teachers.

Teacher P of School X observed:

"Female head teachers handle cases based on gender; they vary their decisions by favouring female teachers than male teachers. It seems that females love each other but when it comes to male teachers, they have a negative attitude towards men hence male teachers are treated unfairly."

Similarly, **Teacher Q of School X** expressed that:

"Sometimes we see different people committing the same offence but the outcome of the cases being different. Female teachers are mostly treated fairly when they are under a female head compared to male teachers."

This perception of gender bias aligns with a study by Anderson (2018), who found that gender dynamics significantly influence leadership decision-making. From a Role Theory perspective, the differing societal expectations and norms assigned to male and female leaders can explain this. These gendered role expectations often shape how authority is exercised and perceived, leading to biases in how decisions are interpreted. When leaders deviate from traditional gender roles-such as women adopting authoritative stances or men displaying empathy-stakeholders may respond based on perceived role incongruence, rather than the actual decision-making process. Thus, perceptions of bias are not only a reflection of individual actions but also of broader social scripts tied to gendered roles within leadership contexts.

In continuation, teachers also noted differences in how cases were handled based on gender.

Teacher C of School Z stated:

"When addressing issues such as dressing, punctuality, and student-teacher relationships, some male head teachers prefer delegating discussions with female teachers to female deputy head teachers."

This practice is consistent with Brown (2020), who argued that gender-sensitive disciplinary approaches are essential to avoid misinterpretation and conflicts in professional settings. According to **Role Theory**, such gender-sensitive approaches are important because they account for the differing role expectations and norms associated with male and female teachers. These gendered expectations shape how disciplinary actions are perceived and can lead to role conflict when administrators fail to navigate these dynamics effectively. Ng'ambi (2010) similarly suggests that, while professionalism is essential, head teachers must also be trained to manage their emotions and remain neutral to prevent personal biases from influencing decision-making. From a **Role Theory** perspective, the expectation of neutrality is part of the role of a school leader, which requires balancing the competing demands of professionalism, emotional regulation, and impartiality in order to meet the expectations placed on them by the institution and society. Failure to do so may lead to conflicts or perceptions of unfair treatment, especially when gender dynamics are involved.

4.5 Challenges in Handling Disciplinary Cases of Teachers.

The study identified several challenges that head teachers face when managing disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex: These include fear of misinterpretation and emotional influence on decision-making.

4.5.1 Fear of Misinterpretation.

Some head teachers, particularly male ones, expressed concerns about being misinterpreted when disciplining female teachers, leading them to delegate such cases to female deputies.

Head Teacher B of School Y highlighted:

"Sometimes teachers of the opposite sex have a mentality that the head teacher hates them based on their gender or sometimes they think that the male head teacher is interested in having a love affair but he is failing to say it. This mentality makes it hard for the head teacher to caution a teacher of the opposite sex."

This is consistent with Meke (2013), who notes that traditional gender roles in Malawi often create barriers for male head teachers in enforcing discipline among female teachers. According to **Role Theory**, these barriers arise from the conflicting expectations placed on male head teachers as both authority figures and individuals shaped by socially constructed gender norms. The reluctance of male head teachers to confront female teachers about disciplinary issues reflects the tension between their role as enforcers of discipline and the societal roles that prioritize a woman's marital status or femininity over professional expectations. These gendered norms create role conflict, where the male head teacher may be expected to uphold discipline but is also influenced by the socially constructed expectation that he should show deference to women, particularly in matters that touch upon personal or domestic roles. As a result, disciplinary actions may be softened or avoided, reflecting how gender expectations can constrain the effective performance of leadership roles in educational settings.

4.5.2 Emotional Influence on Decision-Making.

From a **Role Theory** perspective, the concerns expressed by male teachers about female head teachers being perceived as emotional in disciplinary situations reflect the tension between gendered role expectations and professional responsibilities. Male teachers perceived female head teachers as more emotionally involved in cases involving male teachers, leading to concerns about impartiality in decision-making. This perception can be understood through the lens of role conflict, where female head teachers, in their roles as authority figures, are simultaneously influenced by societal expectations that often associate women with emotionality and relational roles. According to Kachala (2015), this dynamic is rooted in gender power struggles, as female leaders in Malawian society may feel compelled to assert their authority more aggressively when interacting with male subordinates to counter traditional patriarchal norms that subordinate women

in leadership positions. Similarly, Chirwa (2014) highlighted that female leaders may engage more emotionally in conflicts with male subordinates due to cultural power struggles and the need to challenge perceptions of female authority, which are often undermined by entrenched gender biases. These gendered expectations influence the behavior of female head teachers, creating a complex interplay between their professional role and societal norms surrounding leadership and authority.

4.6 Strategies for Improving the Management of Disciplinary Cases

Based on the findings, the following strategies are recommended as suggested by participants to enhance the handling of disciplinary cases; implementation of gender-neutral policies, training on gender sensitivity, managing role conflict through policy adherence and enhancing transparency and communication.

4.6.1 Implementation of Gender-Neutral Policies.

Under this, the participants suggested that schools should establish clear, standardized disciplinary policies that ensure impartiality regardless of gender. The participants' reflections underscore the importance of gender-sensitive leadership in managing disciplinary issues. Head teacher C from School Z pointed out the need for careful handling of both male and female teachers to prevent complaints of gender-based favouritism or mistreatment.

Head Teacher C of Z suggested:

*“As a head teacher you can create your own initiatives at the school, for example;
trying to balance when assigning duties and responsibilities to teachers between*

both genders. In other words, the resources that the school have both males and females need to be given equal opportunities. Involvement of both sexes on issues that affect the school is the important. Because if there is no balance in terms of sharing of duties and responsibilities and also sharing resources between male and female teachers then conflicts might arise. Therefore, as a female head teacher I need to be very careful in the way I handle the female and male teachers so that no one should complain of being mishandled because of my gender.”

This reflects the broader literature on gender and educational leadership in Malawi, where researchers such as Mbilizi (2013) have highlighted the importance of head teachers recognizing how their gendered experiences and leadership styles may influence their interactions with teachers of the opposite sex. Through the lens of **Role Theory**, this awareness is crucial, as individuals in leadership positions must navigate not only the formal expectations of their roles but also the informal, socially constructed gender norms that shape behavior and perceptions. Head teachers are expected to fulfill roles of authority, fairness, and professionalism, yet these expectations are filtered through cultural assumptions about gender. For instance, a female head teacher may be expected to lead with empathy, while a male head teacher may be expected to exhibit assertiveness—deviations from these norms can lead to misinterpretation or resistance. Recognizing how these gendered expectations influence role performance helps leaders adapt their approaches to foster more effective and equitable workplace relationships.

4.6.2 Training on Gender Sensitivity.

The participants also suggested that head teachers and teachers alike should receive training on gender-sensitive leadership to help them navigate disciplinary cases professionally. The participants strongly advocated for sensitization campaigns and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops as vital tools in addressing gender-related challenges in disciplinary processes.

Head teacher A from school X emphasized:

“I think sensitization campaigns can go a long way to help, we need sensitization campaigns, whereby, in a cluster teachers are coming together, discussing about the code of conduct and education policies. This will really help and we really need that one like a CPD targeting teachers of both sexes and having a meeting where all female teachers coming together, saying their challenges and understanding the disciplinary cases that are specifically for them and the male teachers as well and this can really help.”

This reflects the findings of Mussa and Kapesa (2019), who noted that CPD (Continuing Professional Development) workshops in Malawi play a key role in reinforcing professional norms and addressing gender disparities within schools. From a Role Theory perspective, these workshops help educators and administrators had better understand the expectations attached to their professional roles, particularly in relation to gender. When head teachers and teachers engage in structured discussions around gender and professionalism, they are better equipped to navigate and reconcile the multiple, and at times conflicting, social roles they occupy.

The focus on gender-specific challenges in CPD workshops is especially significant, as highlighted by Mbilizi (2012), who noted that gender tensions in Malawian schools often arise from a lack of awareness about how gendered expectations shape behavior and perceptions. CPD sessions can thus act as platforms for role negotiation and gender sensitization, allowing both male and female teachers and their leaders to reflect on and align their role expectations. This process promotes mutual understanding and reduces the likelihood of role conflict and gender bias in disciplinary decision-making. Supporting this, Nyirenda (2014) found that schools engaging regularly in gender-focused professional development reported fewer instances of gender-based conflict and disciplinary challenges, suggesting that clear, shared role expectations improve institutional harmony and leadership effectiveness.

4.6.3 Managing Role Conflict through Policy Adherence

Under this, most of the head teachers emphasized the importance of adhering to educational policies and the teachers' code of conduct as a way to mitigate role conflict, especially when it involves gender dynamics.

Head teacher A of School X expressed:

“As far as I am guided by the education policies, rules and regulations and the teachers’ code of conduct, neither societal nor organizational expectations influence my decisions in disciplinary cases involving teachers either male or female. In simpler terms, I stand my ground on what is expected of me as a head teacher regardless of my gender and that of the teacher involved”

This approach aligns with the findings of Mbilizi (2013), who noted that strict adherence to policies helps educational leaders in Malawi to navigate the complex social expectations surrounding gender and leadership. By sticking to the rules, head teachers can establish a professional identity that separates their personal gender roles from their responsibilities as school administrators.

4.6.4 Enhancing Transparency and Communication.

Some teachers expressed concerns about the lack of transparency in decision-making and proper communication procedures. These suggested for enhancement of transparency and proper communication procedures strategy when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers.

Teacher U of School Z suggested:

"There is a need for transparency in decision-making where every decision is explained clearly to the offender especially on the reasons behind."

This is in line with the study by Garcia (2017) who argued that head teachers should ensure that disciplinary procedures and outcomes are clearly communicated while maintaining confidentiality where necessary. Transparency and effective communication are crucial when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex to ensure fairness, prevent bias, and maintain professionalism. Open communication fosters trust, minimizes misunderstandings, and reduces the risk of false accusations or ethical concerns. A transparent process upholds accountability, protects the institution's reputation, and reassures all stakeholders of a just resolution. Clear documentation and ethical handling of such cases also prevent misinterpretation while supporting the emotional well-being of those involved. Ultimately, these practices reinforce a culture of integrity and professionalism within the educational environment. (Garcia, 2017).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the findings of the study concerning the nature of disciplinary cases, the processes employed in handling them, and the gender dynamics that influence decision-making. The study found that gender plays a significant role in how disciplinary cases are managed, with evidence of bias, power struggles, and resistance affecting outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires structured policies, professional training, and transparent leadership approaches to ensure fairness and efficiency in school discipline management. The next and final chapter is about conclusions and recommendations based on the specific objectives.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents key study findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on the analysis conducted in Chapter four. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and provides suggestions for future research.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The study explored the role of head teachers in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in selected secondary schools in Nkhotakota district. Findings revealed that common disciplinary cases include late coming, absenteeism, intoxication, inappropriate dressing, and lack of lesson preparedness, with male teachers more prone to intoxication and late coming, while female teachers exhibited higher absenteeism rates. Head teachers used both formal and informal disciplinary approaches, balancing strict enforcement with compassion to avoid teacher shortages. However, inconsistencies in disciplinary measures and gender-based biases were noted, as female head teachers were perceived to favour female teachers, and male head teachers hesitated to discipline female teachers due to fear of misinterpretation. Key challenges included entrenched gender norms, emotional influences on decision-making and administrative constraints.

The assessment of the nature of disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools reveals a significant challenge in maintaining professionalism and accountability within the education system. The findings indicate that teacher indiscipline manifests in various forms, including absenteeism, lateness, intoxication at work, lack of preparation, improper dressing, and

inappropriate relationships with students. These behaviours not only affect school operations but also compromise the quality of education. A key observation from the study is the gendered patterns of indiscipline, where male teachers are more likely to be absent, especially under female leadership, while female teachers tend to struggle with work-life balance due to family responsibilities. Additionally, indiscipline among male teachers often spikes at the end of the month, possibly due to financial mismanagement and substance abuse. These trends point to systemic issues, such as poor monitoring, weak enforcement of disciplinary policies, and socio-cultural factors that shape teacher behaviour.

Secondly, the study reveals that while head teachers employ various strategies to handle disciplinary cases, inconsistencies in enforcement and administrative constraints pose significant challenges. The reliance on informal resolutions highlights the need for a more standardized and well-supported approach to ensure fairness, stability, and the maintenance of professional standards in secondary schools.

Furthermore, on analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding how head teachers manage disciplinary cases, particularly those involving teachers of the opposite sex, teachers have mixed perceptions of head teachers' handling of disciplinary cases, with concerns about gender bias being a key issue. Some believe female head teachers favour female teachers, while others note that male head teachers delegate certain cases to female deputies to avoid conflicts. These findings highlight the need for impartial and standardized disciplinary procedures, along with training for head teachers to ensure fairness and professionalism in their decision-making.

Finally, the study found that head teachers face significant challenges when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex, primarily due to fear of misinterpretation and

emotional influence on decision-making. Male head teachers often hesitate to discipline female teachers to avoid misunderstandings, while female head teachers are emotional when handling cases involving male teachers. These challenges highlight the need for gender-sensitive training and clear disciplinary guidelines to ensure fairness, professionalism, and effective leadership in schools.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the specific objectives, the following recommendations are proposed; strengthening disciplinary policies and enforcement, enhancing procedures for handling disciplinary cases, addressing gender bias in disciplinary management and overcoming challenges in managing disciplinary cases.

5.3.1 Strengthening Disciplinary Policies and Enforcement.

Schools should establish clear, standardized disciplinary policies that address common misconduct cases such as absenteeism, lateness, intoxication, and inappropriate relationships. Regular training and workshops should be conducted to ensure all teachers understand the disciplinary policies and consequences of misconduct. The Ministry of Education should provide stronger administrative support to head teachers to ensure consistent enforcement of discipline across schools.

5.3.2 Enhancing Procedures for Handling Disciplinary Cases

Head teachers should adopt a structured and transparent approach when handling disciplinary cases, including proper documentation and adherence to official guidelines. A school-wide disciplinary committee should be actively involved in decision-making to minimize bias and inconsistencies in handling cases. Alternative disciplinary interventions, such as counseling and

mentorship programs, should be introduced to correct behaviour rather than solely relying on punitive measures.

5.3.3 Addressing Gender Bias in Disciplinary Management

Head teachers should undergo gender-sensitivity training to promote fairness in handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex. Schools should implement gender-neutral policies to eliminate perceptions of favouritism or bias in disciplinary actions. Decision-making in disciplinary cases should be made collectively, with input from both male and female senior staff members, to promote objectivity.

5.3.4 Overcoming Challenges in Managing Disciplinary Cases

The Ministry of Education should review administrative processes to ensure that reporting misconduct does not automatically lead to teacher transfers, which can disrupt school operations. Clear communication channels should be established between head teachers and education authorities to streamline disciplinary procedures and reduce bureaucratic delays. Emotional intelligence training should be provided to head teachers to help them manage disciplinary issues professionally and avoid emotional influence in decision-making.

5.4 Further Research

The following are suggested areas for further research:

- Exploring the impact of gender-sensitive policies on disciplinary outcomes in secondary schools.
- Examining disciplinary management practices in different school districts to identify best practices.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the management of disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex, several limitations were noted:

- The study was limited to the Walemera Cluster in Nkhotakota District and may not be generalizable to other regions.
- Some respondents may have withheld information due to the sensitive nature of the topic.
- The study relied primarily on qualitative data, which may be subjective in nature. A mixed-methods approach could provide a more comprehensive analysis.

5.6 Conclusion

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how head teachers handle disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex in secondary schools. The findings underscore the importance of structured policies, gender-sensitive training, and transparent disciplinary processes in ensuring fairness and professionalism. Implementing the recommendations from this study will

help improve disciplinary management and foster a positive working environment in secondary schools.

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6.0 APPENDICES.

Appendix A: Consent Form for Participants.



Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is **Paul Christopher Kabwinja Machilika** a postgraduate student at Mzuzu University. I am pursuing a Master of Education in Leadership and Management. I am carrying out a study on **Exploring Head Teachers' Handling of Disciplinary Cases Involving Teachers of the Opposite Sex: Case of Walemera Cluster in Nkhotakota** as a partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the Masters Degree.

Information you give in this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be accessible to any person except my supervisors and me. Information you give will be used for academic purposes only.

Participation in this study is voluntary. For this reason upon accepting to take part in this study, you are requested to sign in the spaces provided below.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Head Teachers.

Introduction:

- Introduce the purpose of the discussion: Exploring Head Teachers' Handling of Disciplinary Cases Involving Teachers of the Opposite Sex.
- Confidentiality: Emphasize that their identity and all responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Objective one: Assess the nature of disciplinary cases involving teachers in secondary schools.

Types and Patterns of Teacher Indiscipline:

- Can you provide examples of disciplinary cases involving teachers that you have encountered?
- Are there specific types of misconduct that are more common?
- Have you observed any patterns in the nature of these cases?

Frequency and Severity:

- How frequently do disciplinary cases involving teachers occur in this secondary school?
- In your experience, are there variations in the severity of these cases?

Documentation and Reporting:

- How are disciplinary cases involving teachers documented and reported?
- Are there any specific protocols for recording such incidents?

Objective two: Analyze how disciplinary cases involving teachers are handled in secondary schools.

Decision-Making Process:

- Walk me through the typical decision-making process when a disciplinary case involving a teacher arises.
- What factors or considerations influence your decisions in handling these cases?

Collaboration and Involvement:

- Is there collaboration with external entities, like education authorities, in certain cases?
- How are other stakeholders, such as the school board or parents, involved in the decision-making process for disciplinary cases?

Objective four:

Examine challenges head teachers face when handling disciplinary cases, especially involving teachers of the opposite sex.

Gender Dynamics:

- What challenges do you encounter when handling disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex?
- Do you perceive any differences in the way disciplinary cases are approached based on the gender of the individuals involved?

Role Conflict and Expectations:

- How do you manage potential role conflict when dealing with disciplinary cases, balancing the need for discipline with considerations related to gender?
- How do societal or organizational expectations add complexity to handling such cases?

Support and Resources:

- What kind of support or resources do you believe would be beneficial in addressing challenges related to disciplinary cases, especially those involving teachers of the opposite sex?

Conclusion:

Thank the participant for their valuable insights. Ask if they have any additional thoughts or recommendations related to the assessment of disciplinary cases involving teachers. If applicable, mention any follow-up steps or opportunities for further clarification or discussion. Provide contact information in case they have additional thoughts or concerns after the interview.

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teachers.

Introduction:

- **Introduce the purpose of the discussion:** Exploring Head Teachers' Handling of Disciplinary Cases Involving Teachers of the Opposite Sex.
- **Confidentiality:** Emphasize that their identity and all responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Objective three:

Investigate teachers' perceptions on how head teachers handle disciplinary cases, especially involving teachers of the opposite sex.

Teachers' Perceptions on Head Teachers:

- How would you describe the general approach of head teachers in handling disciplinary cases?
- In your opinion, what role do head teachers play in maintaining discipline among the teaching staff?

Handling Cases Involving Teachers of the Opposite Sex:

- What are the specific challenges or considerations have you noticed when head teachers handle disciplinary cases involving teachers of the opposite sex?
- In your experience, what patterns or differences have you observed in how cases involving teachers of the opposite sex are handled compared to other cases?

Communication and Transparency from Head Teachers:

- How do head teachers communicate the outcomes or decisions related to disciplinary cases to the teaching staff?
- In your opinion, are head teachers transparent in explaining the reasons behind their decisions?

Teacher Involvement in the Process:

- How do head teachers involve teachers in the decision-making process when it comes to disciplinary cases, especially those involving teachers of the opposite sex?
- How much input or information do teachers typically have during these processes?

Support for Teachers Involved:

- What support mechanisms are in place for teachers who are involved in disciplinary cases?
- In your experience, how do head teachers support teachers during and after such cases?

Gender Sensitivity and Fairness:

- How do head teachers demonstrate gender sensitivity when handling disciplinary cases, particularly those involving teachers of the opposite sex?
- Can you provide examples of how gender sensitivity is considered in the disciplinary process?

Fairness in Decision-Making:

- In your perception, how fair are the decisions made by head teachers in disciplinary cases?
- Are there instances where you believe the fairness of decisions was compromised, especially in cases involving teachers of the opposite sex?

Recommendations and Feedback:

- In your opinion, what could be done to improve the way head teachers handle disciplinary cases, particularly those involving teachers of the opposite sex?
- Are there specific changes or initiatives you would recommend?

Conclusion:

Thank the participant for their valuable insights. Ask if they have any additional thoughts or recommendations related to the assessment of disciplinary cases involving teachers. If applicable, mention any follow-up steps or opportunities for further clarification or discussion. Provide contact information in case they have additional thoughts or concerns after the interview.

Appendix D: Introduction Letter



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

Department of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies

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16th April 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MR PAUL MACHILIKA

Mr Paul Machilika is a registered Master of Education (Leadership and Management) Program student at Mzuzu University. He has been cleared by the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to collect data for the research study he is conducting as a requirement for the program.

Kindly assist him accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo
Program Coordinator

Appendix E: Division (EDM) Consent to Conduct Research.

Tel (266) 01263611/612 - 01263612

Fax (266) 01263927

All correspondence to be addressed to
The Education Division Manager

Our Ref No. CEED/2/12/20



CENTRAL EAST EDUCATION
DIVISION, PRIVATE BAG 233,
KASUNGU

Date: 22nd APRIL , 2024

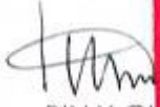
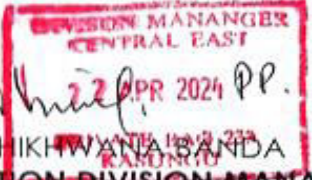
THE HEAD TEACHER

- Nkhunga CDSS
- Majiga CDSS
- Dwasulu CDSS

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY- Mr. Paul Machilika

The bearer of this letter, **Mr. Paul Machilika**, would like to conduct research study at your school as a requirement for his studies with Mzuzu University for the award of Master Degree of Education (Leadership and Management). The schools being Nkhunga CDSS, Majiga CDSS, and Dwasulu CDSS.

Please assist him accordingly.



BILLY CHIKHWANA BANDA
EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (CEED)