

Investigating the impact of continuing professional development on secondary school leaders in the Northern Education Division: A case of the EQUALS school leadership programme

By

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Declaration

I, Maggie RK Chisi, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work that has not previously presented either in part or full, for the degree to any other university. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

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The academic battle has been exhausting and overwhelming, but God has been faithful from the starting line to the finishing line. He has been my strength and source of wisdom. To God goes all the glory.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my late mother, Irissie Nyirenda. A mother who was so loving and caring. She always encouraged me to work hard at school and would never forget to pray with me when going to school and before examinations. May Her Soul Continue Resting In Peace

Abstract

A school leader is critical in as far as learner achievement is concerned. His position is called an expert position due to its complex responsibilities. School leaders' Continuing Professional Development is important in attaining sustainable education. Countries across the globe have been focusing on several In-Service Training systems as interventions towards CPD. Research revealed that several governments have focused on teacher Professional Development aimed at quality teaching and learning. However, the problem is limited, inconsistency and unsustainability of the school leaders' CPDs in some parts around the globe and Malawi in particular. With the view to investigate the impact of school leaders' CPD, the objectives of this qualitative research were: firstly, to investigate leadership practices of secondary school leaders that can sustain school improvement. Secondly, was to examine how secondary school leaders' CPD contribute to their job performance in administration and management of institutions. Thirdly, it was to determine the extent to which the content of CPDs affects secondary school leaders' leadership practices and roles. Finally, it was to interrogate the experiences of teachers under school leaders who underwent professional development through EQUALS School Leadership Programme. The study was conducted in the northern part of Malawi with 20 participants who included six school leaders, twelve teachers, one programme organiser and one quality assurance officer. To achieve this, Adult Education Theory and Technology Acceptance Model were used to dig the views, experiences and challenges of school leaders' daily leadership practices. Document analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis helped the researcher in analysing, interpreting and making sense of the data. The study revealed that CPDs are indispensable for secondary school leadership. For quality teaching and learning and student achievement, school leaders' CPDs should never at one point in the education sector be overlooked.

Key words: Secondary school leader; Continuing Professional Development, Professional development; School improvement; Teachers

Glossary of abbreviations

AEB	:	Academy for Adult Education/ Adult Education Budget
AET	:	Adult Education Theory
ACE	:	Advanced Certificate in Education
CEED	:	Central East Education Division
CWED	:	Central West Education Division
CoP	:	Community of Practice
CPD	:	Continuing Professional Development
CPL	:	Continuous Professional Learning
CLS	:	Coaching Leadership Style
DBE	:	Department of Basic Education
DTED	:	Department of Teacher Education and Development
EDM	:	Education Division Manager
EQUALS:		Equity with Quality and Learning at Secondary School
FDG	:	Focus Group Discussion
INSET	:	In-Service Training
HODs	:	Heads of Departments
MGDS	:	Malawi Growth Development Strategy
MoE	:	Ministry of Education
MoEC	:	Ministry of Education and Culture
NED	:	Northern Education Division
NEP	:	National Education Policy
NOKUT	:	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
PD	:	Professional development
PLC	:	Professional learning communities

PG	:	Professional Growth
TAM	:	Technology Acceptance Model
TPG	:	Teacher Professional Growth
TRA	:	Theory of Reasoned Action
NCSL	:	National College for School Leadership
NITPNSL	:	National In-Service Training Programme for Novice School Leaders
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals
NES	:	National Education Standards
SHS	:	Senior High School
TVET	:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
SEED	:	South East Education Division
SHED	:	Shire Highlands Education Division
SWED	:	Southwest Education Division

Table of contents

Declaration.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Glossary of abbreviations	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.0. Overview of the chapter	1
1.1. Background to the Study.....	1
1.2. Statement of the problem	10
1.3. Study Aims and Objectives.....	12
1.3.1. Purpose of the Study.....	12
1.3.2. Specific Objectives	12
1.4. Justification of the study	13
1.5. Theoretical Framework on School Leaders' CPD	14
1.5.1. Technology Acceptance Model.....	15
1.5.2. Adult Education Theory	18
1.6. Chapter Summary.....	20
Chapter two: Literature review	21
2.0. Overview of the chapter	21
2.1. The position of school leader in the educational setting.....	21
2.2. Secondary school leadership practices that sustain school improvement and their definition	23
2.3. Meaning and nature of continuing professional development	25
2.4. The impact of Continuous professional development on the school leader.....	27
2.5. The extent to which the content of the CPDs affect secondary school leaders' leadership practices and roles.....	31

2.6. Experiences of the participants under school leaders who have undergone professional development.	34
2.7. Chapter Summary.....	35
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	37
3.0. Chapter overview	37
3.1. Paradigm: Interpretive Paradigm	37
3.2. Research Approach and Design	38
3.3. Study Site	40
3.4. Study Population	40
3.5. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques	41
3.6. Data Collection Methods and Instruments	44
3.6.1. Semi-structured Interviews.....	44
3.6.2. Document Analysis.....	46
3.7. Data analysis	47
3.8. Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Study	48
3.9. Ethics/ type of data.....	50
3.10. Limitations	50
Chapter four: Data Presentation, Interpretation and Discussion of Findings	51
4.0. Overview of the chapter	51
4.1. Leadership practices of secondary school leaders that can sustain school improvement in NED schools.....	52
4.1.1. School-based Professional Development	52
4.1.2. Developing people	54
4.1.3. Role modelling	56
4.1.4. Promoting participation in decision-making	57

4.1.5. Individualised support	60
4.2. How CPD of secondary school leaders contributes to their job performance in school administration and management.....	62
4.2.1. Adapt to change	62
4.2.2. Achievement of career goals	63
4.2.3. Accumulated knowledge and skills	64
4.2.4. Identify skill gaps	65
4.2.5. Professional Development opportunities due to digital technology use.....	67
4.3. The extent to which the content of the CPD affects secondary school leaders’ leadership roles in their institutions.	70
4.3.1. Leadership and Management.....	71
4.3.2. Diversity management in schools.....	72
4.3.3. Data management	73
4.3.4. Inclusive education	75
4.3.5. Challenges in schools in terms of resources	77
4.3.6. Conducting research within the school.....	78
4.3.7. Policies and reforms	79
4.4. Experiences of teachers under school leaders who underwent the EQUALS school leadership programme	81
4.4.1. Delegation/teacher involvement	82
4.4.2. Creating an environment for professional development.....	85
4.4.3. Dedication.....	86
4.4.4. Management of school finances	86
4.4.5. Supervising/ monitoring the teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning ...	90
4.4.6. Communication	91
4.4.7. Influence on teachers to achieve common objectives	94
4.4.8. Setting high performance standards and expectations for teachers and students ...	94
4.4.9. Creating collaborative culture and teamwork.....	95
4.4.10. Motivation in the day-to-day practices of the school leader	98
4.4.11. Patience.....	102
4.4.12. Approachability of the school leader	102
4.4.13. Recommendations of the school leaders in different schools.....	103
4.5. Chapter summary	105

Chapter Five: Summary of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	108
5.0 Overview of the findings.....	108
5. 1 Conclusion.....	109
5.2 Implications	110
5.2.1 Educational implications	110
5.2.2 Contribution to knowledge	111
5.3. Recommendations	111
5.3.1. To the Ministry of Education.....	111
5.3.2. To the organisers of CPDs.....	112
5.3.3. To the school leaders	112
5.4. Chapter Summary.....	113
References	114
Appendices.....	129
Appendix A: Consent forms for participants	129
Appendix B: Interview guide for secondary school leaders Section A: Questions on professional development.....	134
Appendix C: Interview guide for and teachers.....	136
Appendix D: Research interview guide for the Principal Quality Assurance Officer	138
Appendix E: Interview guide for organisers	139
Appendix F: Letter of Introduction	140
Appendix G: Support Letter to the Study Site	141

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0. Overview of the chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the current study. It covers aspects like background to the study, statement of the problem, study aims and objectives, purpose of the study, justification of the study and theoretical frameworks adopted.

1.1. Background to the Study

Throughout the past decades, policy makers and school reformers worldwide have embraced school leaders as a lever for school improvement (Mehmet, 2020). As practitioners are initially trained and inducted in many countries around the globe, Globalisation and change demand educating and reeducating at all levels of the educational system. Reeducating is part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as an ideology and reeducating warrant human resource to improve instructional and professional performance (Raza, 2010) leading to continued high level attainment of desired out come and increased potentials. The impact of leadership preparation, induction and continuous support cannot be evaluated independently of the intended outcomes of such activities.

Schleicher (ed.) (2012) states that as more countries require better achievement from their schools and grant greater autonomy to schools in designing curricula and managing resources, Bush (2008) indicated that large sums of money are invested in leadership development because governments believe that it will produce better leaders and more effective schools' systems. Individuals are also contributing their time and resources to through professional development to improve their

knowledge and skills above all enhance their career prospects and make them better leaders (Bush, 2008).

Countries like the United Kingdom and North America are still investigating a range of high-profile initiatives, including leadership standards, leadership centres and change expectations for preparation of school-level leaders (Flessa et al., 2017).

Back in 1998, the United Kingdom announced the setting up of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), aimed at developing world-class school leaders, system leaders and future leaders, to improve the life chances of all children.

In New Zealand, Notman and Henry (2011), indicated that successful school leaders had good mastery of leadership skills. This implies that developing knowledge and skills is a priority in one's career.

In Norway, universities and university colleges offer master's programmes in educational leadership. Institutions are responsible for the quality of programmes, and quality is assessed by a professionally independent state agency under the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). Besides institutions, international studies have also revealed the fact that system leadership at the school district level may remarkably influence professional development towards their school principals and school leaders (Leithwood, Anderson, & Louis, 2012; Paulsen, 2019; Paulsen & Hjertø, 2019).

In Sweden, substantial amount of resources are invested in the Swedish National Training Programme which takes three years and is designed for school leaders issuing thirty higher

education credits and it is compulsory (Forssten Seiser & Söderström, 2022). The school leader must complete within four years of his first assignment. This means that it focuses on the newly hired/appointed school leaders but in Swedish schools, one challenge is how school leaders can be strengthened in their professional roles (Sahlin, 2023).

While studies indicate that continuous professional development of experienced school leaders is unstructured (Sahlin, 2023), another Swedish research Forssten Seiser (2017) found that school leaders stressed the significance of participating in professional networks effecting professional development. This indicates that experienced school leaders in Sweden prefer informal CPDs such as professional networks to formal CPDs which Mizell (2010) recommends.

In the Czech Republic, professional development is comparatively more centrally controlled. Professional development of school leaders is carried out by national authorities or universities that have been approved for the implementation of programmes in a selection process (Huber & Schneider, 2022).

In Switzerland, striving towards professionalisation, school leaders connect themselves to groups that represent their interest and are offered school leadership training opportunities and recently, the universities of teacher education have developed master's programmes for aspiring and (newly) established school leaders (Huber, 2016).

In Austria, the Ministry of Education initiated and financed master's programmes about six years ago; universities of teacher education applied with concepts for implementation; currently, universities of teacher education offer these courses (Huber & Schneider, 2022).

In Cyprus, educational planning and policy, educational laws and guidelines have traditionally been the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). The main responsibilities of school leaders are school administration and management issues, such as handling school correspondence, communication with parents and the local community, and responding to MoEC requirements (Petridou et al., 2017).

In Flanders, a federal country of Belgium, continuous professional learning for school leaders which is also called continuous professional development, is an outstanding need per se (Devos et al., 2018). Despite this position, it is just recently when school leader CPL has been established and found a place on the Flemish policy agenda: the Policy Note on Education 2019-2024 (Weyts, 2019). This agenda is the first one to acknowledge the importance of school leader CPL to improve teaching, learning in schools, and to formulate clear intentions on its organisation (Lazenby et al., 2020).

In Pakistan, a study on the impact of CPDs of secondary school leaders revealed that CPD significantly improved professional skills and positively contributed to education quality consequently, suggesting that policy makers should make CPD mandatory and structured part of school leadership development rather than an occasional optional activity (Ghunio & Arain, 2025).

In United Arab Emirates, CPD is still needed on educational outcomes (Abbasi & David, 2021) which focuses on equipping educators with skills, strategies, and knowledge to directly improve student learning and achievement. Alneyadi (2022) argues that although various programmes have been implemented in UAE, there is still demand for more research on their impact on educational outcomes.

While Development Programmes (PD) in Western and developed countries are often delivered by universities, governments or other agencies, CPDs are normally sustained over numerous months or years generally leading to an academic or professional qualification which literature indicates that applying this approach to developing countries, has many challenges (Bush, 2008).

However, in German, one of the developed countries with high living standards, school leaders are usually (knowledgeable) teachers. There is no formal requirement for school leaders to have a masters degree in school management or any other formal management training (Tulowitzki, 2015). According to a study which was conducted in 2020, Klein & Schwaneberg (2020) asserted that many school leaders did not receive any substantial formal training for management and leadership task. They apply for school leadership and they are expected to have some management experience through special duties during their time as teachers or qualification through further studies.

However, a certain number of school leaders lack thorough knowledge specifically revolving school leadership. As such, school leaders are encouraged to participate in further trainings which are offered by universities usually designed to prepare teachers for school leadership positions (Tulowitzki, 2015). In brief, the school leader PD is both understudied and underexamined in Germany (Schwanenberg et al., 2018).

In a review of literature, to find out the extent and nature of school leadership preparation, and development in Africa, many articles described current development programmes, in terms of content and delivery, school leader recruitment and selection (Bush T., & Glover D., 2025). In

some contexts, there were no formal programmes and leadership learning was unplanned and incidental (Bush T. & Glover, D., 2025).

For example, The World Bank report (2010) observed that professional development of school leaders in the Kingdom of Eswatini was very shallow and has insufficient opportunities for life-long learning. In addition to this, Vilakati (2011) asserted that most school leaders in the kingdom of Eswatini are promoted to leadership positions without skills such as technical, conceptual and leadership. Such a problem has not been addressed (Mashaya, Nsibande & Makondo, 2022).

In Tanzania, the government acknowledges the importance of CPDs but its implementation encounters major obstacles. Among the obstacles is insufficient financial resources, inconsistent existing CPD initiatives, poor organization, unable to address the varied needs of educators etc. (Sonola and Shayo, 2025; Farrelly and Mwinuka, 2023). In the recommendations, the researchers emphasised community involvement in pursuit of a sustainable culture of professional growth among practitioners (Sonola and Shayo, 2025).

In South Africa, professional development of school leaders is not as pronounced and is not well ordered as it is in the developed countries (Mashaya et al., 2022). (Bush & Oduro, 2006) noted that in most cases, it is either lacking or not formal. Advanced Certificate in Education for school leadership was introduced for aspiring school leaders in 2007 by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and named it the Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership (Bush et al., 2011; Botha, 2012).

In addition to this, it is revealed in literature that the department of education in conjunction with 14 Universities introduced the Advanced Diploma in School Leadership and Management to provide continuous professional development for school leaders. However, Botha (2012) observed that it was difficult for school leaders to adjust to the new knowledge and skills gained despite obtaining the Diploma, they continued to run the institutions in their own ways because they had been in school leadership for a long time and had their own methods of running the schools.

In Namibia, it is indicated in the work of Plessis & So-oabeb (2023) that school leaders need to be capacitated with much needed competencies to be able to support teachers in the school. Their study uncovered that school leaders require multiple competencies like accountability, effective communication, good interpersonal relations, administrative competencies, digital competencies etc. This implies that school leaders need retraining to boost their skills and knowledge to suit the ever changing educational landscape. Without updating skills and knowledge in this Era, school leaders would be leading schools in antiquated way negatively affecting school improvement.

In Ethiopia, one of the studies on the impact of CPD in addressing the professional development needs of school leaders, revealed that CPD practices are highly effective in meeting their specific professional development needs (Alemayehu & Kebede, 2025). The researchers recommended that due to the impact of the school leaders CPD, educational institutions in Addis Ababa continue to support and invest in CPD programmes for school leaders.

In Ghana, a study was conducted in 2025 to explore the current CPD practices and the perceptions of its benefits among school leaders. The findings revealed that school leaders perceived significant benefits including development of administration and leadership skills, enhanced knowledge and increased efficacy (Ansah, Borketey & Kaitoo, 2025).

In Malawi, in recognition of the role of CPDs, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed a National Framework for Continuing Professional Development (CPD Framework) for teachers and teacher educators to guide the design and implementation of CPD programmes (MoE, 2018).

The underlying aim of the framework is to improve the quality of teaching and learning practices and therefore raise student learning outcomes at all levels of the education system, as stipulated in the ministry's strategic objectives/outcomes, which is to provide high quality professionals in all fields, and the ministry's vision and mission, which is to provide quality and relevant education to the Malawian nation. The framework contributes towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal number 4 (SDG4) on the provision of quality education and lifelong learning (MoE, 2018).

Sisungu et al. (2014) state that education is the vehicle for national development; for this reason, many developing countries have invested massive amounts of resources in the sector. Being the vehicle and regarded as key that will grant many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved, education needs to be financed massively, as other countries like Kenya are doing. As a result, people will access quality education and break from the pattern of poverty (Department of Global Communications, 2023).

The CPD framework, in relation to the National Education Standards, is aligned to the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II) and the National Education Sector Plan 2008-2017. They consider the goals and objectives of education in Malawi and the guiding principles of access and equity, quality and relevance, and governance and management in all education subsectors (National Education Standards, 2015).

In his foreword, Fabiano (2015) indicates that on one hand, the standards are challenging, and on the other hand, achievable. Therefore, it is the responsibility of education administrators and advisory services in divisions and districts to explain, interpret and exemplify the standards to education practitioners and civil society within their individual contexts, across all sectors and at all levels in the system (National Education Standards, 2015).

In a research conducted in 2023-2024, by the Centre for Study of African Economies (CSAEs) into school leadership in Malawi, provides compelling evidence that targeted interventions can provide significant improvements in education outcomes through empowering school leaders. The programme significantly improved learning outcomes setting a benchmark of scalable cost-effective education reforms (Centre for Study of African Economies, 2024).

Based on findings of a few previous studies, considering school leaders' professional development worldwide is still a concern. This is in line with Wamba's (2015) findings, which show that there are a few empirical studies focused on leadership practices and professional development of school leaders in Malawi.

Malawi has since engaged in active implementation of CPDs guided by the National Framework for teachers and teacher educators in collaboration with its partners like university

of Malawi (UNIMA) and Malawi business of Applied Sciences (MUBAS) to the present. It is against this background that the researcher was prompted to embark on this research, focusing on the school leadership programme that started in 2019 under the University of Malawi (School of Education), the EQUALS School Leadership Programme funded by the World Bank.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In recent years, the position of secondary school leaders has become dynamic, such that it demands school leaders to be knowledgeable and well-equipped with skills on how to handle their institutions.

In line with this, Devos et al. (2018) state that school leaders need to be supported with CPD to keep their skills updated to prevent issues of drop out and job-related psychosocial challenges. This is based on the understanding that school leaders' positions have become complex and remain immensely administrative rather than instructional demanding knowledgeable, multi-skilled and expert leaders as indicated by Bush & Glover (2016) consequently calling for specialist leadership training for school leaders. For example, in the 1980s, Louis (1980) noted that school leaders have discussed the diversity of responsibilities associated with their job, such as being everything to many people and having ten different roles, or being like many things. Thus, the diversity of school leaders' work points out various sorts of knowledge and expertise one is expected to master, so that at least you need to know a little bit of everything to execute such diverse work, from facilities manager to nurse to counsellor, and so on. Simply put, being a school leader is multi-tasking as at the same time you are a task manager, a business person, a counsellor, a doctor, a nurse, and you're all these different things.

Although there is extensive recognition of the need for credentials that are valued during the process of selecting school leaders, there is also agreement that the training and professional preparation that school leaders receive is of mixed quality at best (Torreque-Arcadia et al., 2016). One of the National Education Policy's (2013) priority areas in Malawi is quality teacher education for both primary and secondary schools.

However, NEP (2013) indicates that the provision of quality and relevant teacher education at both primary and secondary levels faced many challenges which present literature indicates ongoing implementation challenges. Among other challenges is the inadequacy of Continued PD for in-service teachers a topic under discussion. This is in line with the findings of a systematic literature review in a study that was conducted in Zambia where Acton (2021); Muyunda & Wanjuan (2023) argue that school leaders are not equipped with managerial skills, yet they are expected to lead schools effectively in the face of numerous challenges externally and internally imposed pressures, for example inadequate professional development opportunities which Aas and Vavik (2015) argue the same.

To deal with the professional and skills gap in school leaders, the Ministry of Education in Malawi, began conducting CPDs of school leaders in schools. One such initiative is the Equals School Leadership Programme which was implemented by the School of Education at the University of Malawi. The initiative is now four years old. However, Wamba (2015) states that there is little published research about secondary school leadership in the Malawian context compared to other parts of the world, and a significant gap in knowledge regarding training and professional development programmes exists in Malawi.

Literature show that school leadership and management is developing but studies on the impact of Continuous Professional Development remains limited (Mrutu, Anywar & Kulwenz, 2025). Among a few empirical studies that have been written on CPD, Wamba, 2015 and Zamula, 2019 focused on school leader preparation and challenges that novice secondary school leaders face on their positions. Based on the literature gap on School Leadership CPDs and through studying the Equals School Leadership Programme which was implemented by the University of Malawi, this study aims to investigate the impact of CPDs on school leaders.

1.3. Study Aims and Objectives

1.3.1. Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to investigate the impact of professional development on secondary school leaders by interrogating whether the training addresses the needs of school leaders or not.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- To investigate the leadership practices of secondary school leaders that can sustain school improvement in secondary schools in NED.
- To examine how CPD of secondary school leaders contributes to their job performance in the administration and management of the schools.
- To determine the extent to which the content of CPDs affects secondary school leaders' leadership practices and roles in their institutions.
- To interrogate the experiences of the participants under school leaders who have undergone professional development through the EQUALS School Leadership Programme.

1.4. Justification of the study

Based on Hallinger's (2012) call for high standards and transparency in reviews of literature in educational leadership and management, the researcher was prompted to respond to the call and participate in this area of research. Additionally, research on school leaders' learning and professional development is still limited and scarce worldwide (Daniels et. al., 2020). A large body of research in education focuses on pupils and teachers. School leaders are less researched, especially when it comes to their professional development.

Apart from this, school leaders are often not well prepared for their job, but are regarded as agents of change and are among the most important factors in influencing pupil achievement, and must deal with an uncertain and complex world (Nhlumayo et al., 2025). Additionally, knowledge concerning school leaders' professional development is important regarding keeping the position of school leaders attractive and learners' achievement. Wamba (2015) states that there is little published research about school leadership in the Malawian context compared to other parts of the world, and a significant gap of knowledge regarding training and PD programmes exists in Malawi. These underlying aspects inspired the researcher to further explore the impact of school leaders' professional development and focus on a group of school leaders who have undergone the EQUALS School Leadership Programme.

This study provides insight into the dynamics of school leaders' continuing professional development in this period of educational transformation and reform. This current qualitative study has unraveled school leaders' perceptions, reactions, daily life experiences, and views of the benefits of the EQUALS School Leadership Programme, which they have undergone.

Not only school leaders, but also the lecturer from the University of Malawi, School of Education, the Chief Quality Assurance officer from the Northern Education Division Office, teachers, who are under the targeted school leaders.

Furthermore, it has also helped the planners gain a deeper insight into school leaders' perceptions about this type of professional development and contributed to an empirical base that is based on practical experience rather than scientific proof for a broader approach against which theoretical hypotheses can be tested.

The results of this study are important for online training providers, particularly government bodies that provide training programmes to improve or maintain e-training in Malawi, and have also enriched the body of literature on the impact of continuous professional development of school leaders.

1.5. Theoretical Framework on School Leaders' CPD

School leaders' CPD is influenced by a complex set of interacting personal, institutional, and contextual factors and is therefore context-bound. The personal and contextual factors determined what aims leaders can pursue with their CPD, what content was appropriate, and what learning methods school leaders used. School leaders' CPD therefore understood as a context-bound and goal-oriented learning activity, involving multiple aims, diverse content, and a broad range of learning methods. Therefore, to better understand school leaders' CPD, it was appropriate for this study to adopt two theories that complemented each other. That is, in this study, a multi-theoretical perspective was adopted, which brought together the aims,

content and learning methods that characterise school leaders' CPD, and various personal and contextual factors that influence school leaders' CPD.

Designated with a variety of aims and that school leaders are adults, one of the theoretical perspectives views school leaders' CPD as a strategic and goal-oriented adult learning activity; hence, Adult Education Theory (AET) fitted in this study.

In addition to the AET, the Acceptance Technology Model was used to complement the aforementioned theory. ATM was fitted in this study because of the methodologies that were used in the CPD of the school leaders. For instance, with Equals Leaders' CPD, classes were conducted via an online platform called Moodle.

1.5.1. Technology Acceptance Model

To better understand this strategic use of learning, it is appropriate to view school leaders' CPD through Technology Acceptance Model perspective, which was proposed by Davis (1986, 1989, 1993). Davis (1986) adapted the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to develop a reliable model that could predict actual use of any specific technology.

Amongst the elements, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were regarded as two major elements influencing user willingness to utilise a specific technology (Davis, 1989). This is vital in the 21st Century for educators. The knowledge of Information Literacy is important because access to information is driven by technology that must be learned, for an individual to be a competent information user (Encyclopedia Britannica 2010). Since individuals did not have choices on what to learn and how to learn in the EQUALS School Leadership Programme,

the researcher explored the attitudes, experiences, perceptions and challenges faced by school leaders during the CPD training with the aid of Technology Acceptance Model.

TAM is a theory where individuals must accept the use of technology due to the technological issues emerging in the world since the dichotomisation of pedagogy and technology, as it undermines what should be a dynamic relationship and may ignore other factors such as teachers, students, the curriculum, and physical/virtual classrooms (Tsui& Taraves, 2021).

Tsui and Taraves (2021) claim that while Digital Technologies (DTs) could help in re-shaping and re-imagining pedagogical approaches, retooling is involved when DTs are adapted for a specific pedagogical approach, highlighting the interconnection and interdependence of technology and pedagogy. This is unlike the rational choice theory, which permits individuals to choose among many. Individuals weigh the options; when to go for studies, at what age, which path to take as they grow in their career, and what content to be included in the studies. As such, he or she gathers information about the cost, benefits and disadvantages in determining preferences.

However, theoretically, expectancy-value theory and sociological models that account for decisions through the effect of socio-demographics are frequently used in CPD research to explain why people choose to participate in CPD or not (Boström & Palm, 2020; Kuhn et al., 2022). These ideas can be used to interpret theoretical descriptions of the perceived CPD needs of school leaders, and explain why people engage in CPD or not.

Choices are seen by expectancy-value theories as a complicated process that is impacted by individual inclinations (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Decisions are made

based on a person's expectation of success on the one hand, and the value attached to a certain activity on the other. Both expectancy and value are influenced by a person's perception of these elements.

Therefore, expectancy-choice theories, the sociological models and the rational choice theory do not apply in this study, since the EQUALS School Leadership Programme is the government's initiative through University of Malawi, which instituted this CPD where some lessons and assignments were conducted via Moodle.

The EQUALS School Leadership Programme is mandatory for all school leaders because the school leaders were not consulted to identify and present their needs to be incorporated into the content of the modules and the organisational structure of their courses. Therefore, leaders need to be positive in the acceptance of technology in the advancement of their knowledge and skills, not only in the professional development, but also in the digital technological knowledge and skills.

The researcher used the theory in coming up with data collection tools, like the interview guide. It also guided the researcher in choosing relevant literature to be reviewed in her study. Not only this, but it also guided the researcher in explaining the findings in a way that remains around the topic. Above all, the theory helped the researcher to provide clear and manageable focus for the research.

1.5.2. Adult Education Theory

Given that andragogy is about adult education, the researcher chose Adult Education Theory, along with TAM, to advance the study's arguments. Adult Education Theory views adult learners as having unique characteristics bound to their age and their life experiences.

Currently, higher educational organisations understand the need to change themselves from a pedagogy level of education to an andragogical level of education. As a result of technological influences, educators are challenged to blend the underpinnings of both styles to meet the situational demands of curriculum and student needs (El-Amin, 2020). Absolutely, Joshi (2017) discovered that higher education organisations thrive upon a culture where students are seen as adults who take more responsibility for their learning than those in compulsory institutions. These age-based characteristics of adults affect how adults learn and the conditions that lead to competent learning (Bouchrika, 2018; Drossel et al., 2019; Henschke, 2009; Knowles, 1970). For instance, differing from younger learners who are still anticipating their future adult roles, adult learners are fully engaged with their roles and responsibilities as adults and built on the basis that adults are self-directed and motivated.

Consequently, these commitments limit the time and resources available for learning, and make learning worthwhile before time and resources are committed to it (Lawler, 2003). Andragogy, as a preferred learning style of adults compared to pedagogy, and cognitive learning, develops relational significance to adult learners (El-Amin, 2020). Knowles (1970) considered many of these adult-based qualities of learners and concluded that an adult as a well matured learner, and a well-developed and a self-dependent resultantly, can direct his or her own learning.

An adult, therefore, directs their own learning. Furthermore, the years they have spent in their career, every adult has accumulated a deep pool of experiences that influence their learning, but most importantly, form a resource for their learning. Furthermore, adults are fully engaged with their adult roles and responsibilities. As such, their learning is meaningful if it aligns with their current and future roles, especially the unpredictable challenges the world presents. The other feature of adult learners is their problem-centred approach to learning and the desire for immediate application of knowledge.

On the same, Knowles (1970) in his reviewed adult education research, concluded that while adults are motivated by external motivators like monetary rewards, internal rewards like personal fulfilment have stronger motivational power on the learning of adults (Henschke, 2009; Jarvis, 2004; Knowles, 1970; Payne, 1991; Schwartz, 2014; Thompson & Deis, 2004). In this regard, the EQUALS School Leadership Programme motivated the school leaders to participate in the programme, since there was a monetary allowance prepared for them (Interview, 2023).

Additionally, Knowles (1984a) contended that Adult Education Theory is therefore a consistent starting point to explain school leaders' CPD practices bound to the adult characteristics of school leaders. Hence, school leaders display the characteristics of adult learners, like independence, self-direction, goal-directed learning and self-motivation, and they tend to assume responsibility for their role in the learning process. Thus, adult learning programmes must accommodate this significant perspective.

Furthermore, based on their context, school leaders have multiple motives and reasons for participating in school leaders' CPD, and these motives and reasons guide their choices with

regard to timing for CPD, content, and learning methods. Observed CPD practices by school leaders can thus be explained as the outcome of these three decisions. However, the choices adult learners make are influenced by the context within which they make those choices. Online courses must be structured so that they are easy to navigate, accessible to those with limited ability, and the requirements and assignment documentation must be clearly communicated. At the same time, instructors must create an environment that engages the learning community by utilising announcements, discussion boards, blogs, video conferencing, group project interactions, simulations and gaming (El-Amin, 2020).

The theory supported the researcher by guiding her in the formulation of questions when she was developing tools for the study. Apart from this, the theory gave her ideas on areas to do a literature review. Again, it helped her in the discussion of the findings to relate what the literature indicates and what was revealed in the study. Both theories complemented each other and aided the researcher in navigating around them as she developed the study.

1.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the background of the study and the direction the researcher desired to take. Discussion of the problem that the study wanted to investigate has been done including the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, ultimately, the theoretical framework that guided the study. This chapter is followed by the review of the literature which sets the basis for this study.

Chapter two: Literature review

2.0. Overview of the chapter

This chapter presents reviewed literature related to the position of school leader in the education setting and how the complexities may affect school leaders' practices, secondary school leadership practices that sustain school improvement and their definition, meaning and nature of continuing professional development, the impact of CPDs on school leaders, the extent of the attention given to CPD in literature. Additionally, the effect of the content and the experiences of teachers under school leaders who had undergone equals school leadership program. Finally, exploring what other researchers have concluded on CPD impact on school leaders.

To come up with rich qualitative data related to the topic, review of literature was guided by interpretive paradigm. The researcher used interpretive paradigm with the aim of gaining deep insights into the experiences of the participants from countries across the world. This was done by reviewing journals, articles, project reports, modules for the training, masters and doctoral theses related to her study. The findings of various studies revealed the school leaders' perceptions and experiences on their CPDs. This was the intention of the researcher.

2.1. The position of school leader in the educational setting

School leaders' position has become complex due to the current global changes Awodiji & Naicker (2025); Klein & Schwanenberg (2020) making the school leaders' duties more complicated and challenging demanding knowledgeable and multi-skilled leaders who can enhance students' performance and the overall quality of teaching and learning in an improved leadership ((Fry & Egel, 2021; Mestry, 2017; Gupta and Gupta, 2020). As School leaders play a critical role in guaranteeing a favourable environment that fosters effective learning,

equipping learners with relevant knowledge and skills in schools is not exceptional (Leithwood et al., 2020; Gupta and Gupta, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2008).

The current global changes call for improved leadership capacity to lead a sustainable system. Contemporary scholarly literature suggests that school leaders play a significant role as evident in the work of Battle (2010); Devos et al. (2018) who state that school leaders must deal with the challenging task of socio-economic changes and high accountability as well as working with their teachers to encourage initiatives for school improvement (Lovett, 2015). This makes their job complex and stressful. Researchers agree that due to the complexities and challenges of school leaders' responsibilities, there is excessive amounts of stress and eventually burnout affecting performance in the schools. This is evident in one of the responses of school leaders in the work of Sahlin (2023 p.13) said she had delegated more, and found that it is best together ... as school leader and feel that the heart rate is lower because they do the work together which also came out from a teacher in this study, 'the school is big, he cannot do everything on his own, he delegates and teachers report to him.' This implies that when the school leader is equipped with knowledge and skills, he or she acts professionally: delegating and involving teachers in the daily activities of the school avoiding heavy load which can drain him/her leading to burnout.

Based on the complexity of school leaders' position they need to be prepared and continue to be supported as they take their role of supervising the teachers as indicated by Acton (2021) that school leaders are not equipped with managerial skills, yet they expected to lead schools effectively in the face of numerous challenges.

Despite abundant evidence in the literature of the importance of the school leader in achieving desirable outcomes in their schools, little scholarly research has been conducted on the various forms of school leadership and their impact on teaching and learning (Corrigan and Merry, 2022).

2.2. Secondary school leadership practices that sustain school improvement and their definition

Schools are places where students are prepared for future responsibilities. These schools are under pressure to improve quality teaching and learning and achieve lasting outcomes they are expected to lead social and societal change and contribute to national competitiveness (Forde, 2011). It is established in literature that one of the key factors that influence schools to succeed is the skill and commitment of the school leaders (Bush, 2008). As such, school leaders are expected to be possessed with relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to achieve effective learning performance in their schools (Awodiji & Naicker, 2025). It is therefore the duty of the school leaders to make sure that the daily interactions in the school leads to solid professional communities where educational standards are raised and achieved hence school improvement (Gougas & Malinova, 2021).

Practices expected of school leaders are frequently outlined in formal standards documents which are described as essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes that school leaders must demonstrate if they are to provide effective school leadership which Geyer (2013) argues that this is only possible if the school leader engages in continuous professional development more especially in this era of the ever changing technological world. Similarly, Nhlumayo & Mabelenga (2025) asserts that school leaders must be capacitated with the skills and knowledge to enhance school leadership.

Leadership and practices are interrelated in the sense that one cannot talk about leadership without mentioning practices. It is indicated in some of the definitions of leadership. The manner and approach in which the leader directs, implements plans and motivates staff, is referred to as leadership practices (Urio, 2023).

Henry Mintzberg (2011) defines leadership as “a practice.” His argument is founded on scores of studies of how leaders deal with difficult situations in their leadership role. He adds that a source of leadership expertise is learning from personal experience which very important.

School leadership practices have a direct influence on both student and teacher dedication including teaching and learning in classrooms (Agyeman, Nana Yaw Mr and Aphane, Vanessa Ms, 2024). School leaders need management and leadership skills to help them study and analyse the environment resulting in a positive leadership hence school improvement. The findings of this study confirms that CPDs are essential for school leaders as one leader indicated that he had no idea of conducting a research by studying the environment to establish the needs of the school so that the leader can make informed decisions.

African literature reveals that although the position of school leaders is crucial, still for many countries the responsibility of building a strong leadership has not received due attention to foster them perform their roles properly (Urio, 2023; Nhlumayo and Mabeleng, 2025; Simelane, 2015; Vilakati, 2011; Mashaya, Nsibande & Makondo, 2022; Coenen, Hondeghem, & Schelfhout, 2022) as expected by society. Scholars have recommended continued support for school leaders’ capacity building while stressing areas of concentration in some studies like Coenen, Hondeghem, & Schelfhout (2022) recommended that policymakers and organisers of future school leader CPD to consider networked designs for instance, group reflective learning

programmes, professional learning communities etc.) as identified by literature and participating school leaders that they meet the preconditions.

Furthermore, it is also evident in the recommendations made by Agyeman et al (2024) that school leaders should continue in their education and participate in development programmes that offer exposure to effective leadership techniques, attitudes, and behaviours. In their study, they emphasised that leadership training and development should focus on leadership behavior like sharing decision making, delegating responsibilities and providing a supportive environment.

This calls for school leaders to be responsible for their professional growth not only waiting for government's planned CPDs as indicated by Megginson and Whitaker (2007) that it is no longer possible to do all your learning at the beginning of your career and depend on that knowledge throughout your working life. He added that we are experiencing technological advancements which need skills and knowledge update now and again in one's career life to perform or work better in line with responses from one of the school leaders in this study who said 'we cannot rely on what we learnt in college alone. Some of us went to college twenty years ago. There is a lot that has changed.'

2.3. Meaning and nature of continuing professional development

Literature presents more than one definition of continuing professional development and different researchers have written about CPD and define it differently. Ememe et al. (2013) hypothesised that CPD is the name connoting a continuous means through which individuals

in the job build on already acquired knowledge and understanding to sustain complex knowledge required to be successful on their job.

Three decades back, some researchers defined CPD as the continuous development of knowledge required for professional and technical tasks during a practitioner's career (Robert, 1987). Mitchell (2013) describes continuous professional development as a procedure through which an individual acquires the skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes for improved practice. In summary, the professional development process is the period in which the professional evaluates, increases or renews his responsibilities and acquires knowledge and skills by interacting with his environment during this stage (Mehmet, 2020).

In this study, CPD is defined as an ongoing process of acquiring knowledge and skills throughout one's career life. In the absence of CPD, school leaders' practices, competences, knowledge and skills may be inadequate causing leadership of institutions to be behind the times acutely affecting school improvement. This is in proximity to the assertion made by Chachar et al., (2023) that teachers' instructional methodologies may become outdated, thereby diminishing pedagogical efficacy and adversely affecting students in the absence of teachers' CPD. TAM fits in this study due to its dimensions that school leaders need to accept the use of technology in their career to update their skills to suit the ever changing educational landscape. Findings of many studies show that it is a must that school leaders acquaint themselves with the technology to be able to execute their roles well. For example, data management demands skills in technology use to be effective in all areas of their leadership.

Continuous Professional Development for educators, especially school leaders, has been emphasised in various policies in Malawi, notably USAID (2011), National strategy for teacher

education and development implementation strategy and Malawi Government (2018) establishing the CPD Framework for teachers and teacher educators. This validates the importance of CPD in the working life of every educator and school leader in Malawi and beyond.

In Malawi, CPD is used by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) to provide professional and educational support to in-service teachers and school leaders (Malawi Teacher Professional Development Programme, 2012). Consequently, there is execution of expectation by maintaining and improving the human resource for the benefit of members, students and the wider society.

Andragogy, as indicated by Knowles (1970), adults are motivated by external motivators like monetary rewards, internal rewards like personal fulfilment have stronger motivational power on the learning of adults (Henschke, 2009; Jarvis, 2004; Knowles, 1970; Payne, 1991; Schwartz, 2014; Thompson & Deis, 2004). In this regard, the EQUALS School Leadership Programme motivated the school leaders who are adults to participate in the CPD because there was monetary rewards like allowances.

2.4. The impact of Continuous professional development on the school leader

Continuous professional development is progressively regarded as extremely important to creating more effective schools such that there are various discussions about how to best train future and existing leaders (Jasen, 2016). This is evident in the work of Bush (2008) who asserts that the global interest in leadership development is predicated on the widespread assumption that it will lead to school improvement, and enhanced learning outcomes.

According to Lazenby et al. (2020) continuous professional learning (CPL) which is also referred to as continuous professional development, is extremely important to develop, update or modify school leader' knowledge, skill and attitude base to align with the numerous expectations and equip them with strategies to adapt and sustain professionally. Despite this importance, less is known about the professional development of experienced leaders than aspiring school leaders.

However, while some countries discussions of school leader development are mainly rhetoric, elsewhere real actions have been taken to provide important opportunities for school leaders (Bush, 2018), notably by the British government and the English NCSL.

While in a rapidly changing society, education in general and schools in particular are faced with diverse challenges hence the complexity of school leader position (Huber & Schneider, 2022) but the quality of teaching in educational institutions depends on the professional growth of education leaders (Mashaya et al., 2022) leading to the demand for CPDs of school leaders by many countries around the world.

For instance, in the United Arab Emirates, education sector continues to evolve rapidly as such, there is an increasing demand for ongoing professional development (PD) among educators and leaders ((El Afi, 2019; Azaza et al., 2023). Alneyadi (2022) argues that while various programs have been implemented, there is still demand for more research on their impact on educational outcomes, especially within the UAE's unique sociocultural and economic context. This context introduces specific challenges that career advancement (PD) approaches may not sufficiently address (Abbasi & David, 2021).

Such development is essential for equipping school leaders with the competencies to address the emerging challenges within this dynamic environment. Competent and effective school leaders are highly needed to provide the climate for teachers to flourish in such complex situations and advance for firm and the entire nation's progress (Frendo, 2023). This is in line with literature as it indicates that educational leaders who are good at leadership skills and competencies produce better results in terms of both student's performances and school management, (Jayaweera & Weligamage, 2021; Abbasi & David, 2021) such that its importance cannot be underestimated.

Although a developing body of research has emphasised the importance of school leadership for quality improvement in schools, which strengthens the importance of school leaders' continuous professional development in working life and the issue is increasingly being given attention but the empirical evidence for this perspective is limited (Sahlin, 2023).

In a study that was conducted in Pakistan on the impact of CPDs on school leaders, the study confirmed the value of professional development in strengthening leadership skills. The research denotes that CPD has a direct impact on school change management, enhancing interpersonal, self-management, and supervisory competencies (Khana, Sherazib & Khan, 2025) indicating that CPD enhances leadership's impact on organizational outcomes as asserted by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) who argue that professional growth is necessary to guarantee that leaders can manage the dynamic educational context, handle complex situations, and drive institutional change.

Furthermore, school leader professional development is greatly rooted in the promotion of leadership and management abilities. To achieve this, school leaders must sharpen their skills

in motivating and inspiring their teams, managing both material and human resources efficiently, and nurturing a great learning environment. For example, professional development assists school leaders in acquiring the ability to make decisions based on facts, which is basic for school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010) and to communicate a clear and persuasive message that inspires and motivates their team to strive towards a common objective (Sinek, 2017).

Similarly, results of a study by Ariratanaa, Sirisookslipa and Ngang (2015) showed that school leaders have to possess human relation skill, communication skill, develop mutual understanding and actively participate in reformation until they achieve its goal. If school leaders lack professional development, it can lead to knowledge gaps and decreased motivation for their professional growth (Acton, 2021). It is for this reason that school leaders highly need continuous professional development to improve their skills and abilities, allowing them to contribute more effectively to the educational process (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Bush & Clover, 2013; Frendo, 2023).

However, in contemporary educational literature much is about teachers as revealed by the work of Bo et al. (2018); Banowat (2025); Karim (2020), and little attention has been paid to the professional development of school leaders indicated by Nugroho et al. (2025) and Norman (2017), despite their vital role in improving student learning outcomes. The little literature that is available focus on content which is evident in the findings of Bush and Glover (2025) sidelining the issues of whether and how professional development programmes have an impact on leadership (Gumus & Bellibas, 2020).

To date, research on the influence of school leaders has focused on their actions within the school context in terms of supporting teachers' participation in professional development and

their work in the classroom afterwards (Hilton et al., 2015); creating a gap on equipping the leaders (capacitating) with skills as most literature indicate (Nhлумayo & Mabelenga, 2025).

2.5. The extent to which the content of the CPDs affect secondary school leaders' leadership practices and roles

There have been broad international agreements about the need for school leaders' professional development in order to obtain the capacity required to improve teaching, learning, students' development and achievement (Drage, 2010). Frendo (2023) asserts that in today's dynamic and complex educational system of learning, educators must comprehend that pursuing continuous professional development is not a choice but an obligation.

As Andragogy (Adult education theory) asserts that based on adults' context, school leaders have multiple motives and reasons for participating in school leaders' CPD, and these motives and reasons guide their choices with regard to timing for CPD, content, and learning methods. School leaders as adult should reason in updating their skills to match with the technological issues in their roles as Andragogy establishes that school leaders are adults, matured, well educated, who can direct their own learning. This is evident in the findings where one of the school leaders echoed that the participants of the EQUALS school Leadership Programme, everyone was serious and no one could be seen outside when classes were on including the drunkards. This indicates that the school leaders saw relevance of the School leadership programme.

Apart from formal experiences such as attending workshops, seminars, mentoring, professional meetings, conferences, peer observations, discussions with colleagues and formal courses (Tantawy, 2020), it is suggested by researchers that the motivation to learn on their own and

through networking with other school leaders could improve school leadership (Nhlumayo & Mabeleng, 2023) as Boren et al. (2017) concluded that ‘principals’ must be continuous learners if they are to keep with the demands of today’s complex and ever changing educational environment. This will help them in learning and constructing meaning instead of acquiring it. School leaders as adults must be guided by Andragogy in making decisions in participating in CPD hence improving their leadership skills.

In addition to this, school leaders can build personal interpretations of the world interactions and informal experiences such as reading professional publications and watching television documentaries, video conferencing related to school leadership and management (El-Amin, 2020; Simachew, 2023). This can only work when school leaders are equipped with technological skills formally and informally in line with Technology Acceptance Model where individuals must accept the use of technology due to the technological issues emerging in the world.

Tynjälä (2008) indicated that it is believed to be profitable when the formal and informal learning are integrated followed by assessment of lessons learned or examination of past mistakes is done. Thus, Frendo (2023) indicates that school leaders appreciate the benefits of engaging in CPD both for their own personal development as well as that of their school. In her research, it shows that decisions regarding participation in formal or informal CPD activities are influenced by the individual's perspectives towards CPD, organisational assistance, and the relevance of the CPD on offer. This is in line with one of the dimensions of Adult Education Theory which state that adults look for the relevance of the CPD. In this case, it is confirmed in the findings of this study that school leaders were serious because they saw the relevance of the CPD as soon as they started learning.

Findings from a study done in 2022, revealed a broad consensus from teachers that they see change in their school leaders after attending CPDs. For example, teachers viewed that professionally developed school leaders have the ability to motivate their teachers to teach effectively, school leaders were able to manage school resources, teachers viewed professional development as a tool that enabled school leaders to create a collaborative and inclusive learning environment (Mashaya et al., 2022).

The above findings are consistent with the findings of a study (Bush, 2008) which indicates that many participants claimed significant profits in their confidence and personal development.

Similarly, from a Southern European island nation, Malta, school leaders acknowledge the importance of engaging in CPD to boost their leadership and management skills. The work of Frendo (2023) indicates that the research demonstrated a strong link between endorsing the importance of CPD training and actively participating in them. This implies that much that countries around the world offer CPDs for their school leaders it is the obligation of the school leaders that they be proactive towards such. This inserts that the importance of school leaders CPD is felt by many countries around the world.

Researchers fully appreciate continuous professional development's impact on driving efficient leadership and management in schools (Frendo, 2023). In the findings of Frendo (2023) school leaders hailed accessible yet targeted opportunities for practical professional development which are indispensable in nurturing effective educators.

2.6. Experiences of the participants under school leaders who have undergone professional development.

Knowing that teachers are the main beneficiaries of school leaders' professional development which in turn should support effective teaching and learning, the researcher incorporated the teachers in her sample. This was to dig their experiences and find out how they perceive the professional development of school leaders. The teachers were asked to share their experiences to find out if school leaders who had gone through professional development acquired relevant managerial skills or not.

This is in line with the work of Mashaya et al. (2022) where teachers were asked to indicate whether school leaders that had gone through professional development acquired relevant managerial skills or not. The findings of their study revealed that school leaders that had gone through professional development programmes acquired relevant managerial skills such as development of a school vision, passion in supporting teaching and learning, monitoring for effective teaching and learning, motivation of teachers, management of school resources and creation of an inclusive learning environment.

Similarly, the findings of (Forssten Seiser, 2017) asserts that the school leadership programme had impact on school leaders' school daily life such that changes were easily noticeable. For example, one school leader, a team player advocates distributed power and leadership. This is indicated by open communication system which contributed to a favourable climate and relational trust among her colleagues. The teachers confirmed the changes in their school leader by describing how their school leader created rules and routines for communication and decision making, challenging the school's informal organisation.

Furthermore, Bush (2008) indicated that the changes in the school leaders were often confirmed by members who noted participants' zeal on their return from CPD. This means that teachers in the institution act as monitors of school leaders and in this study, they were very important to confirm what the school leaders said about their CPDs.

The findings were consistent with findings of Nhlumayo & Mabeleng (2025) which recommends capacity building for school leaders to be empowered with technological, financial, conflict management and management skills etc.

2.7. Chapter Summary

The review has displayed that school leaders highly need CPDs which enhance their knowledge and skills in turn improve educational outcomes. It is so encouraging that school leaders and some researchers have appreciated the CPDs that school leaders attend. They have described CPD as a job motivator. However, gaps have been revealed through the findings of different studies. First, Continuous Professional Development Programmes are done, but much is about teachers sidelining the school leader one of the key factors for school improvement. Second, lack of sustainability and inconsistency of CPDs in Malawi as well as in other developing countries. Third, literature on the impact of CPDs of school leaders is limited and PD programmes in some developing countries are incidental. This study has enriched the body of literature by uncovering the challenges and gaps that the education sectors have in various countries. It can be concluded that, irrespective of the geographical area, the benefits of CPD programmes cannot be downgraded. As such it will foster different governments to revisit their CPD policies. Several studies have the same findings. The interpretive paradigm enabled the ability to establish relationship between the experiences and perception of school leaders with the research subject. This has resulted in acquiring adequately rich description that can be

transferred to similar situations in other studies in Malawi i.e. this study and other countries and finally, in depth understanding.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0. Chapter overview

This chapter presents the research design, the research paradigm, the method of inquiry, population of the study, sample size, sampling techniques, study site, data collection tools, ethical consideration, data analysis procedures that were used in this study.

3.1. Paradigm: Interpretive Paradigm

This study used an interpretivist paradigm. As a paradigm, interpretivism strives “to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 26). In interpretivism, truth does not represent objective reality as in positivism. Instead, Pessu (2019) states that interpretivism views reality as multiple, subjective, and socially constructed. Researchers use interpretivism with the aim of gaining deep insights into the experiences of the participants by collecting and analysing rich qualitative data. This was the intention of the researcher. In this sense, knowledge is arrived at by capturing the subjective meaning of social action in research based on interpretivism (Bryman, 2016).

The goal of interpretivism is to understand “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 221). Therefore, both participants’ and researchers’ understandings were necessary to make meaning of the phenomena which was studied. The researcher, with participants in the social and professional settings of their school, generated knowledge. The researcher aimed to capture the subjective meaning each school leader brings into the social action of leading schools in the school-based context.

Saunders et al. (2019) argue that interpretivists believe that the experiences of individuals vary depending on their contexts and circumstances and that reducing the complexity of the context

through generalisations will result in the loss of rich insights into humanity. Planning to investigate and understand participants' experiences, attitudes, and behaviour, an interpretivism paradigm most fitted for this study. In the shoes of interpretivist researchers, I conducted an in-depth study based on a range of qualitative data from a small sample. Additionally, I adopted qualitative methods of analysis to understand the everyday life of the study participants, just like other interpretivist researchers.

3.2. Research Approach and Design

The researcher chose to embark on a qualitative study due to its nature. The study explored a phenomenon that focused on individuals' attitudes about a particular case, EQUALS School Leadership Programme. As defined by Ary et al. (2006), a qualitative approach is a method that is designed to study intensively the background, status, and environmental interactions of a given social unit, like an individual, group, event, institution, or community. As such, multiple sources of data through detailed and in-depth data collection were involved (Creswell, 2013). Bogdan and Blikstein (2003) define a qualitative study as "a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (p. 54). However, in this study, it is defined as permitting the researcher to sufficiently and logically obtain full data about the participants and the professional development project in Malawi.

Due to its nature, a qualitative study does not involve numerical data, but explores social phenomena such as meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, symbols and description of things (Berg & Lune, 2017). The qualitative study helped the researcher to engage in an inductive style, which focused on individuals' meaning and importance of rendering the complexity of the situation (Creswell, 2007). Morse (1991) states that qualitative research is exploratory, and a new topic that has never been addressed with a certain group of people suits

best. This makes the research the researcher embarked on to stand a better chance since literature presents that there is limited research on school leaders' CPD and none has been presented anywhere on the EQUALs School Leadership Programme in Malawi. This means that little is known about school leaders' CPD in Malawi on the EQUALS programme.

To achieve its aims, the study utilised a case study design due to its increasing popularity among qualitative researchers (Thomas, 2011). Since the researcher was dealing with a single group of people within a bounded system, a single case study was the best choice (Yin, 2017). A bounded system refers to the delimited scope or boundaries of the case being studied. A bounded system can refer to a single individual, group, event, organization, or any other phenomenon that the researcher is focusing on (Coombs, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several renown researchers like Yin (2009), De Vaus (2001), Whyte (1943, 1999) and Allison and Zelikow (1971) have enriched and contributed to the body of literature through their studies to the methodological developments leading to increased popularity of case study approach across disciplines (Creswell, 2013). Case study research demands an in-depth investigation into an individual, group, or event to gain an understanding of a real-life phenomenon (Coombs, 2022).

The goal of case study research is to gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of the case subject and to generate new theories or insights which are widely used and accepted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2022). In line with Coombs (2022), the purpose of this research was to investigate real experiences of participants and come up with detailed data in form of a wide coverage, the case had representative participants from the entire population. Thus, one division represented all the six divisions to come up with quality, applicable, and holistic results (Cohen et al., 2007). Case studies are strong on reality and provide researchers with an

opportunity for greater depth of understanding of an issue (Stake, 2010). They provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting the interpretation of other similar cases (Cohen et al., 2007). Although the geographical coverage is big, case studies can be undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team, causing the researcher to be at ease in her choice of design pertaining to this study.

3.3. Study Site

The education sector in Malawi has six secondary school Educational Divisions, namely: Northern Education Division (NED), South East Education Division (SEED), Central East Education Division (CEED), Shire Highlands Education Division (SHED), South West Education Division (SWED), and Central West Education Division (CWED). However, the current study was conducted in the Northern Education Division, targeting schools whose school leaders had gone through the EQUALS School Leadership programme.

All the education divisions would have been the study site for this study since the EQUALS School Leadership Programme was for the nation, but it was confined to only one division as suggested by principles of qualitative research. Wide coverage would be unrealistic for one researcher, which would have defected the whole study; as such, Northern Education Division (NED) was chosen out of the other education divisions.

3.4. Study Population

The participants were recruited following research procedures. As one of the priority areas in the 2013 Education Standards Act is to promote and enhance skills and knowledge, all secondary school leaders and some deputy school leaders were involved in this programme.

However, not all school leaders participated in this study. A total of six selected school leaders participated and represented the school leaders who participated in the CPD, 12 teachers under the participating school leaders, one organiser from university of Malawi, one quality assurance officer from NED offices. Participants who met the recruitment criteria, that is, those who participated in the EQUALs School Leadership Programme and volunteered to participate, were given consent forms before the interviews. Apart from the school leaders, participants included one University of Malawi member of staff in the School of Education, a Senior Quality Assurance Officer from the divisional office and twelve teachers that is two from each school.

3.5. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Bertaux (1991) recommends that the smallest sample size in all qualitative studies is 15, while Creswell (1998) recommends that the recommended sample size should be from 20 to 30. Creswell (2012) argues that if the group size is large, it is difficult to handle the discussion, and if the group is small, the discussion cannot meet the research purposes. Therefore, the numbers presented by the researchers are just regarded as guidance to novice researchers, and as such, the researcher did not go into arguments as to why researchers differ on sample size.

The researcher had a sample size of 20 participants. Since the study demanded a comprehensive assessment across a broad area, the Northern Educational Division, a sample size of 20 was appropriate because her study was not aimed at generalising the findings, but at understanding what it means to experience a phenomenon (Converse, 2012; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Considering that qualitative research requires extensive effort in analysing data, a larger sample can be time-consuming and often unrealistic (Mason, 2010). However, the sample of 20 in this

study was beneficial to the researcher due to its coverage of the research site. Additionally, different participants can hold diverse views and opinions.

Although all school leaders in the country participated in the EQUALS School Leadership Programme, not all schools and school leaders were involved in this research. The researcher used purposive sampling to come up with the sample. Purposive sampling was chosen based on the participants' knowledge of the topic's aims and objectives, as such, this demanded specific kinds of people who held different and important views about the ideas and the issues in question (Robinson, 2014).

All participants who underwent the EQUALS School Leadership Programme in full knew the topic of study and were the best to help the researcher with the expected data. This was evident in the responses to the questions on the interview guide.

Homogeneous sampling was employed, which demands exploring a very specific subgroup in depth. The steps taken by the researcher targeted meeting the Education Division office for records. At the EDM's office, through the Desk Officer, the researcher was told that every school leader participated in the programme.

The research focused on six school leaders, one chief Quality Assurance officer at the EDM's office, one Faculty of Education member of the University of Malawi and twelve teachers. School leaders who underwent this School Leadership Programme were eligible participants in this study. The screening process took place through the Education Division Manager (EDM) from their CPD records to identify potential participants. Screening was done because there were some changes, for example, some school leaders who participated in this CPD were

posted to other schools to teach, others had retired, and others had just been appointed. Still others missed the training due to circumstances beyond their control, like sickness as indicated in the figure 1. Those who started the CPD programme and were still in duty stations were eligible participants. Referrals were made where necessary to have only school leaders who participated fully in the EQUALS School Leadership Programme. Six schools were identified across NED, and all school leaders in these schools were eligible to participate. Individual school leaders were contacted and booked for interviews with two teachers under their leadership.

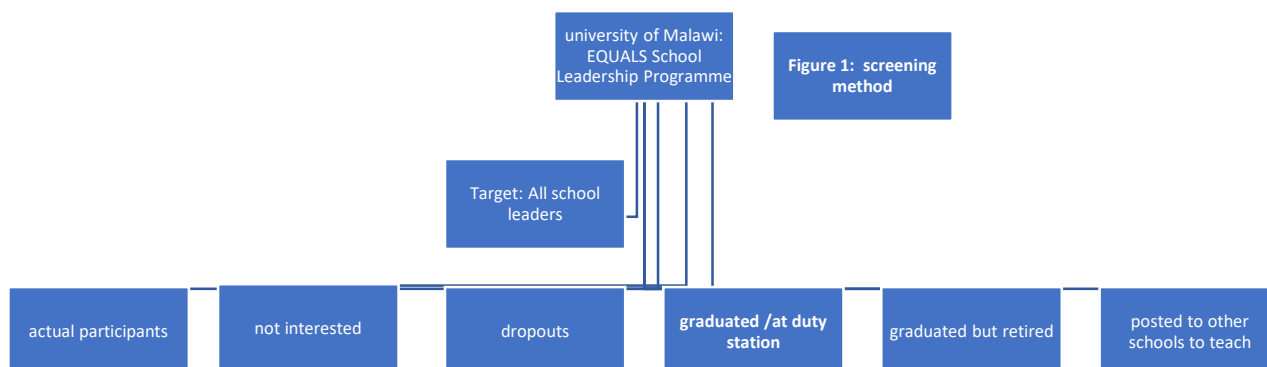


Figure 1: screening method

3.6. Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The study used semi-structured interviews and document analysis as data collection methods, both of which are commonly used in qualitative studies.

3.6.1. Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher mainly relied on in-depth interviews with the school leaders, teachers, the senior Quality Assurance Officer, and University of Malawi organisers. Since little is known about school leaders' CPD, a qualitative approach was chosen to generate insights into school leaders' responses to the CPD they have undergone. The researcher finished data collection within a period of four months.

The researcher collected data from participants using semi-structured interviews. Questions related to the topic of study were listed on the interview guides as shown in appendices, since

case studies typically involve conducting interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Literature indicates that in case studies, one suitable way of conducting interviews is using semi-structured interviews (Lauterbach, 2018; Sandall et al., 2018; Sarvestani et al., 2019). Based on this argument, the researcher avoided unstructured and open-ended interviews to avoid losing focus as warned by van Manen (1997). As case study research, interviewing participants in the same way does not defect this research, because the researcher covered all categories of questions (Vagle, 2018) as indicated on the appendices of the participants.

Vagle (2018) agrees with Patton (2002), that by using a pre-determined set of questions, the interviews yield responses, which focus on the central themes of the study and facilitate the analysis process for the study. As such, she treated the interviews as a valuable opportunity to explore their views, experiences, challenges and motivation. In so doing, the participants helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of their professional leadership practices, views and thoughts about the phenomenon, because semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to use some other prompts depending on the answers for further clarification when needed.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interview while recording at the permission of the participants in order not to miss any details. The researcher took 20 to 30 minutes interviewing individuals. During the interviews, the researcher took some notes of the answers of the participants. This helped the researcher to refer to the responses of the participants when necessary. To avoid unexpected disruptions, the researcher requested for a designated room at every school.

Her role as an interviewer aided her participants to revisit their experiences through the questions, she was asking related to the context, leadership role experiences and the meaning

they associate with leading institutions. The researcher took an active role in the meaning-making process by listening attentively, asking probing questions.

Lopez and Willis' (2004) argument, that the researcher's presuppositions or expert knowledge are valuable guides and make the inquiry a meaningful undertaking and being an insider with educational experience, was advantageous to the researcher. The semi-structured nature of the interview method aided her to motivate the participants to describe their experiences with Moodle Platform, an online learning platform, their opportunities, the difficulties they faced, and any fears or reluctance and resistance they had (Yin, 2014). With this information, the researcher might place their lived experiences in the context of their daily social and professional contexts. By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to ask probing questions such as 'Can you give me an example?' or 'Can you tell me what the term means to you?' These questions fostered participants to provide a more detailed description of their previous responses.

3.6.2. Document Analysis

Interviews were backed by the studying and analysing of the available documents, reports and statistical data about the project and analysing them to generate insight into how and what the planners included in the documents of school leaders programme. To understand the background of the EQUALS School Leadership Programme and CPD in general, the researcher studied and analysed the project documents such as the reports, Project modules, the 2018 CPD frame work, National strategy for teacher education and development implementation strategy. Examining and analysing these data give a researcher access to key information that adds insights into participants' experiences (Ramsook, 2018). The knowledge gained from these

documents helped the researcher in the formulation of questions on the interview guide and a broad picture of the study was revealed.

Additionally, a literature review on CPD served the development of the investigated group on EQUALS School Leadership Programme. Analysing the documents, the researcher explored their textual contents but also considered what purpose they are meant to serve in a particular context. That is when applied to this study, for instance, the researcher asked whether a document's existence or nonexistence made any difference to her participants in this case school leaders' everyday professional life. The multiple sources used in this study provided a reliable study because of the match of the sources in the results.

3.7. Data analysis

The researcher had two sets of data, one from semi-structured questions through oral interviews and the other one was document analysis. Data from interviews was transcribed and merged with data from the documents. Following this, codes were developed and from the codes, themes reflecting the objectives were established. The findings were presented according to the specific objectives and the discussion on each objective was done in order.

The researcher recorded the interviews using audio recorder which was later transcribed word for word. The transcription was presented to the participants for validation in line with Torrance's (2012) work. Creswell (2007) argues that triangulation involves "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on the theme or perspective" (p.208).

Furthermore, thematic analysis was used in analysing this study. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The researcher chose to use thematic analysis because it is suggested that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned because it offers the gist of skills that will be appropriate for conducting many other kinds of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Additionally, this is arguably the most influential approach, probably because it offers such a clear and usable framework for doing thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Since the goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, thus, patterns in the data that are important or interesting and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue (Clarke & Braun, 2013) it has aided the researcher in analysing, interpreting and making sense of the data rather than just explaining. Similarly, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

3.8. Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Study

Different ways are used to determine the trustworthiness of qualitative research. In this study the goal was to uncover lived experiences of participants. The four criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research are credibility, dependability, and conformability and transferability but not all are relevant to this study. In this case the most relevant criterion was credibility. Krefting (1991) state that triangulation and member checking are some of how credibility can be ensured, which the researcher did. Creswell (2007, p. 208) argues that triangulation involves “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on them or perspective.” To increase the credibility of this case study, the researcher ensured that triangulation was achieved through data collection methods.

Firstly, by reviewing interviews; crosschecking of school leaders' views about CPDs and the School Leadership Programme they have undergone with their actual leadership practices through the teachers' views. Data was reviewed for all the participants. This helped the researcher to find common practices, views among the school leaders in this study.

Secondly, as she gathered data through other methods, such as studying and analysing documents, the researcher achieved methodological triangulation. Using these multiple methods implied that she examined the connection between what is written in the documents (requirements of school leaders) and the daily practices of individual participants, in this case, school leaders through interviews in line with Creswell's (2014) argument, that qualitative data draw on diverse strategies of inquiry.

Thirdly, the duration of the researcher's data collection allowed her to achieve triangulation through prolonged period. Every detail of the responses of the participants was recorded and kept in multiple places to avoid losing information. The researcher labelled the files carefully to easily trace them when original source was needed in the later stages of data analysis.

To validate the accuracy of the data, the researcher asked the participants to review the transcription of their interview (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This is referred to as member checking; as such, it has increased credibility of the study. Since data was gathered through other methods like document analysis, the researcher achieved methodological triangulation. The multiple methods which she used helped the researcher to come up with the connection between what is written in the documents and what participants responded to the semi-structured interviews. To increase accuracy of the interview questions, it was reviewed by peer researchers. In addition to this, the researcher informed the participants about the study and to give them the

interview questions ahead of time to validate the authenticity of the study. Finally, the researcher presented the proposal to Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MzuniRec) for review, and to minimise errors.

3.9. Ethics/ type of data

The researcher first got a clearance from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC), followed by permission from the Northern Education Education Division Manager and the school leaders of the targeted schools before starting to collect data. Appointment was booked before going to the schools. The researcher observed ethical principles by firstly consulting the study participants before collecting data. The participants were informed about the aim of the study and the need for their participation. The participants were assured that no part of the information provided by them would be publicised but treated with high confidence. In respect of ethical principles, pseudonyms have been used and each participant signed a consent form for acceptance. Names of participants and schools have not been mentioned.

3.10. Limitations

The key limitation of this study was the small sample size, which was also limited to one education division. As such, the opportunity for generalisability is low. This is a small study with 20 participants in the Malawian context. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to other Malawian school leaders in other contexts. The study was limited not only because of its size, but also because it only focused on the impact of CPD on school leaders.

Chapter four: Data Presentation, Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

4.0. Overview of the chapter

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative research study that was conducted using a case study design and based on the interpretive paradigm. According to the interpretive paradigm, the findings are discussed in the context of existing literature whose outcome is interpretation of findings. Eisenhardt (1989) calls that literature, surrounding literature.

This study also used a qualitative approach which employed a case study design which focused on six secondary school leaders, twelve teachers, one organiser, one quality assurance officer who were purposively sampled. The study was framed by multi-theoretical approach. Technology Acceptance model and Adult Education theory directed the framing of this study. Adult Education Theory (Andragogy), as the preferred learning style of adults compared with pedagogy and cognitive learning develop relational significance to adult learners (El-Amin, 2020) who direct their own learning (Knowles, 1970). TAM complemented andragogy in the sense that the CPD that was conducted combined face to face and Moodle Platform lessons. Questions were formulated to check school leaders' perspectives and experience on the use of technology.

The themes have been presented as verbatim quotes from the participants as indicated by Cohen et al. (2007) that some studies include a lot of verbatim conversations with the view of maintaining the flavour of the original data as such direct phrases and sentences are reported, not only because they are often more illuminative and direct than the researchers' own words, but also because they feel it is important to be faithful to the exact words used.

The researcher used two data collection methods in order to provide methodological triangulation in this study. The two data collection methods used were interviews for school leaders, teachers, Quality Assurance Officer, organiser and documents review. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Thematic analysis is described as a research method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes which often lead to new insights and understanding (Thomas, 2006; Elliot, 2018; Creswell, 2014). The themes used to analyse the data were widely related to the literature reviewed and the objectives of the study.

4.1. Leadership practices of secondary school leaders that can sustain school improvement in NED schools

The first objective of the study was to investigate the practices of secondary school leaders that can sustain school improvement in NED. The research showed that after the EQUALS School Leadership Programme, school leaders improved their attitudes and confidence, which resulted in improved leadership practices around the professional standards of effective school leadership. Andragogy and TAM guided in the framing of the study. Knowing that adults are well matured, responsible and are able to direct their own studies, the study was framed by Andragogy as the lens.

4.1.1. School-based Professional Development

School-based Professional Development is one of the themes that participants mentioned. They revealed that school leaders encourage teachers to professionally develop themselves. They indicated that school leaders conduct and participate in CPDs. They are taught skills on how they can be leaders.

Two teachers from schools 2 and 6 talked of school leaders conducting CPDs/meetings, and one said:

*The school leader conducts meetings and school-based CPDs and gives us information on how we can be leaders and we altogether participate (**Teacher 2 from school 2**).*

Teacher 2 in school 6 explained that:

Yes, yeah, why I am saying that it's because at a school level he always organises some professional development meetings, to say... yeah workshops at school, to say in science where do you feel we have some short falls then he invites other people from outside, those who are experts in those issues we have raised. I remember last term; he invited a certain teacher from a neighbouring school who is an expert in English. So, she came here, dealt with teachers and even learners. So, he is really somebody who can assist in terms of professional development, yes.

Teacher 1 in school 1 explained that:

Yes, that's why at school we can conduct INSET (In-service Training) like capacity building for teachers which is done termly. Last term we had one and this term we have had one although it was on cluster level, but all teachers were involved, we were participants. Last term it was a school based but on cluster level, all teachers participated. Our school leader is a cluster leader. So, it's for the benefit of both, the cluster and the school.

This means that teachers' capacity has been built through the EQUALS CPD. Both teachers and students benefit, hence school improvement, as indicated by **O1**:

Teachers and students are the beneficiaries of the training in the sense that when the school leaders went back, they brought in changes that may have affected students. May

have affected teachers there so, in terms of the beneficiaries, we have three levels, the school leaders themselves, the teachers at the schools where the head teachers are coming from and the students. So, the knowledge that they acquired certainly reached their teachers and we also had reached the students. Not that they would be teaching them but in terms of their conduct, their change in conduct will be felt by the teachers as well as the students.

This is in agreement with the findings of Mashaya et al. (2022) the teachers were asked to indicate whether school leaders that had gone through professional development acquired relevant managerial skills or not. The findings of their study revealed that school leaders that had participated professional development programmes acquired relevant managerial skills to support teachers. This helps the teachers to work competently in the schools resulting in school improvement requirements. Additionally, since school leaders are accountable for schools' improvement, they need to promote their staff to reach their highest performance (Ellett & Teddle, 2003), as their teaching approaches and practices are closely connected to students' achievement and along these lines the overall school improvement (Lambert, 2003).

4.1.2. Developing people

Participants indicated that the skills acquired from the leadership programme have helped their school leaders apply them through desired leadership practices, by developing teachers in one way or the other. Through team teaching, joint planning and joint experiments, teachers are individually developed to high self-esteem, whereby at the end of the day, they can deal with challenging topics on their own. This is similar to a study by Berg and Karlsen (2020) who argue that coaching leadership as a technique supports and challenges colleagues, to assist them in attaining individual growth and development which in this study was recommended. Again,

Ganesh Kailash (2024) pointed out that CLS is about empowering members of the team to be the best versions of themselves which CoP uses its principles of supporting each other on their challenges initiated and established by knowledgeable school leaders.

Teacher 1 of school 3 indicated that:

On challenging topics, at a certain time we had a CPD where we were looking at Community of Practice (CoP), we had a meeting where we were briefed on how to conduct community of practice where it is all about, if someone is having a challenging topic through the department they should discuss as a department and then they should teach that challenging topic as a group, yeah. And for this term in the science department, we had that issue whereby in form three it was chemistry we discussed as a group and then we went in a class and delivered the lesson as group. We were doing an experiment on titration. So, we did that as a group, yeah.

Teacher 1 in school 3 said that:

We have been having INSETS as well as CPDs as a cluster. So, we had an inset as a cluster we also had CPD as a school, yeah. And our school is a mixture of old timers and new timers so, most of the times when we have caucus he tries to clarify some of the protocols in the system on what we are supposed to do if you have an issue where can you go about that issue, and when it comes to teaching whether lesson planning or schemes, most of the times when we have small meetings he always encourages us and direct us on how to go about issues, yeah.

The data indicate that teachers are supported by relevant practices fostering learning from fellow teachers, especially when they have challenging topics. They plan, teach and do

experiments together on challenging topics, which in turn builds up the individual who had challenges. This is in line with Hassan et al. (2017); Amin (2019) and Huber (2011), who argue that a supportive workplace fosters a sense of belonging and restricts boredom, which heightens the standard of education overall. Furthermore, Drago-Severson (2012) argues that school leaders struggle to find ways to create school climates that are supportive of teachers' growth, which promote improved practice. With the EQUALS School Leadership Programme, it is easy for them, they do not struggle to handle different issues like the development of people under them anymore.

This means that when school leaders are well-informed, they can support people individually as well as a group. Consequently, teachers are developed and become responsible professionals because they know what to do. The findings in this study show how school leaders are developing people in their profession through the desired practices.

4.1.3. Role modelling

Participants revealed that they admire their school leaders and respect them when they are doing well. With the School Leadership Programme, they see potential and appreciate the work of their leader while looking forward to continued student achievement in the school. This is evident in the responses made by some participants as follows:

Teacher 1 at school 4 said:

I respect him. He is dedicated. He is never busy and he is never tired of us. He is never tired of the duties always he will want to..., we want to ask something, the office is always available.

Teacher 2 at school 6 indicated that:

It's my wish if he will continue doing this, then this school will always be on the map, yeah because right away from the staff room, teachers are motivated he is just friendly, where things go wrong he comes in to advise to say gentlemen we shouldn't be doing this so we reason together so he is somebody who is just assisting us and we are sure, if we will be assigned some positions, we will just emulate him because he is doing fine, sure madam.

Teacher 1 at school 6 said that:

When we meet, of course we interact on how we can run the institution and his leadership, I have benefited a lot. I have benefited a lot because, I am learning more from him, yeah.

The data indicate that teachers admire their school leader's behaviour, and it greatly impacts on them. They learn and appreciate the work. They anticipate sustained student achievement through the behaviour of the leader. This shows that the skills learned from the EQUALS School Leadership Programme are benefiting the teachers and the students.

4.1.4. Promoting participation in decision-making

This is another theme that came out from the participating teachers. Many participants indicated that some school leaders promote participation in decision-making such that leaders do not make decisions on their own. However, there were various experiences from a few participants that, despite undergoing EQUALS School Leadership Programme, their school leaders have exceptions in areas where they promote participation in decision making.

Teacher 1 in school 1 shared this:

There are committees that are supposed to report to the school leader. Say, teachers are given different responsibilities that's why I am saying I am involved, yeah. It's like he has delegated some of his powers to me and I must report back.

Furthermore, **Teacher 1 in school 2** said that:

Our school leader most of the times delegates the deputy school leader and the Heads of Departments to be handling some issues, i.e. discipline issues. So, the leader doesn't make decisions on his own. In addition to this, when there are cases concerning several departments, they are left to those departments to be sorted out and later reported to his office.

Teacher 2 of school 3 reported that:

On the final decision, despite that he involves us, to go around the issue, but at the end he makes the decision. Based on what we have contributed, yeah. I think it's just okay. I think that's good rather than just coming up or allowing people to contribute then at the end cancelling everything. That is not okay.

Contrary to what **teacher 1 from school 3** said, **teacher 2 school 3 (the same school)** reported that:

He does not. He is tough on that one. He is very tough on that one. Okay of course sometimes, I just perceive it in this way. Sometimes he tries to involve us that you contribute, he ignores that one and use his own, of which I don't see ... we already know that it's just a trick like to us who are there. Like try to involve us, to make things as if it has been actively participated by the staff but he doesn't like that even if it's the majority still he ignores that.

The question is how can two teachers from the same school experience differently on the same situation? This means that teachers note things differently as school leaders discharge their duties. In this case the teachers know that the leader conducts a discussion for formality's sake knowing that he already has his idea which he will implement.

This indicates that teachers act as “watchdogs” for leaders therefore, school leaders need to know that they do not simply impose goals on followers because this triggers resistance in teachers, but work with the teachers to devise a sense of purpose and direction. These findings are in line with Danbaba et al. (2021), who argue that school leaders basically work through and with members of staff, thus, exercising distributive leadership in schools, which is one of the most effective leadership approaches where decision-making and responsibility are shared among a team of leaders, rather than being centralised in the hands of one individual.

Contrary to the findings, Gimah (2023) argues that in the secondary school system, among other things; the managers (principals) are accountable for monetary transactions within the school system. It is a transparent manner of doing things so that everybody will clearly see what you have done.

Different from this, **Teacher 1 in school 6** said that:

This is a big institution where there are a lot of things. He cannot manage to do things on his own. So, there are several things he delegates, yeah. He delegates. If he is away, yes. If he is away, there is a situation here, he is just reported to. We have done this, this, this. There was this, but we always make sure that when we have done something, we have to report so that we move together.

Teacher 2 school 6 reported that:

He does because I have evidence when there are issues about...let's say entertainment, issues about graduation, farewell parties there are always committees which look into those issues, when something is concerning let's say entertainment; he says can you go and meet Mr. so, so, so, who is the leader in that department, so decisions from there, that's where now the chair of that committee comes to report to him. But normally it is not him who passes decisions in different committees. He delegates to say no, if this is what you are talking about, can you meet Mr. so, so, or madam so, so, so from there, that is when now things move forward, yeah.

The data indicate that for effective administration of the schools, school leaders, particularly those who have undergone the EQUALS School Leadership Programme, are expected to play their leadership practices in line with the management and leadership skills equipped with by the leadership programme. Being accountable for directing, encouraging, influencing, supervising, and stirring the learners, teachers, parents, and other educational stakeholders to collaborate and contribute to achieving the objectives (Kristiawan et al., 2017), the school leader must have the ability to carry out their duties with a complete sense of responsibility as they have been equipped.

4.1.5. Individualised support

Participants indicated that they are supported by the school leaders whenever they have problems. As such, participants expressed happiness for such a practice from school leaders. They added that they are motivated. This is an indication that schools have health environment due to the leadership and management skills acquired by school leaders from the Leadership Programme.

Teacher 2 from school 1 reported that:

He tries to provide leadership, I mean direction. May be there is this thing you have to do it this way, you have to do it this way. If there are cases, he is open to let us know, that there is this issue we discuss, something like that. I am happy with my school leader. However, as an institution, we are different and everyone has his or her on perspective but as for me, overall, I can say I am happy.

Teacher 2 from school 2 reported that:

We are motivated. I am very motivated because most of the times the school leader will be there guiding you where you have problems, solving the problems together. So, we always work hand in hand when you do that most of the times you become motivated, yes.

The findings reveal that teachers are individually supported by school leaders. It came out from two out of twelve teachers though on this type of support. This agrees with Hilton et al (2015), who argue that to date, research on the influence of school leaders has focused on the actions of school leaders within the school context in terms of supporting (or otherwise) teachers' participation in professional development and their work in the classroom afterwards. This means that school leaders need to be well knowledgeable and multi skilled to handle teachers in this transformation and changing world. Effective leadership plays a vital role in teacher motivation. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), supportive and transformational leadership styles positively impact teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance. When school administrators actively recognise and appreciate teachers' efforts, it fosters a positive work environment and motivates teachers to excel.

4.2. How CPD of secondary school leaders contributes to their job performance in school administration and management.

Continuous professional development of secondary school leaders contributes to school leaders' job performance in administration and management of schools in the sense that knowledge acquired from the CPDs, change school leaders' mindset on their positions. During the interviews with school leaders, they indicated that they have gained varied skills through continuous professional development they had. Some of the themes that emerged were managerial skills, adapt to change, achieve career goals, accumulated knowledge and skills.

4.2.1. Adapt to change

The participants revealed that change to them was undeniable due to the knowledge and skills they had been equipped with in consistence with (Aas, 2016). The change came in the sense that their needs were met through the EQUALS CPD. This is evident in the words of one of the organisers after they conducted a small evaluation.

O1 indicated that:

Well, after the training, we did a small evaluation that showed that school leaders felt that they acquired skills that they were not aware of and had indicated that they were going to implement the knowledge that they had acquired.

Again, **O1** said that:

When school leaders went back, they brought in changes that may have affected the teachers and students. So, the knowledge that they acquired certainly reached their teachers and we also had reached students.

This shows that school leaders have changed due to skills and knowledge acquired through the training. This is evident in the responses by participating teachers who are under them. Teachers voiced out the changes they see in their school leaders. The school leaders themselves echoed how hugely they gained knowledge and skills through the CPD, and were ready to use the knowledge and skills in their leadership practices and roles.

4.2.2. Achievement of career goals

The findings further revealed that with the knowledge acquired, school leaders would achieve career goals like improving student outcome and a positive school culture, fostering school growth through professional development, mentorship by developing individuals as well as advancing the school's vision by promoting team spirit. **School leader 1 and 4** revealed that:

You will agree with me that the school manager plays a big role in the sense that for discipline to be instituted in the school, there is need for the manager to be well equipped. For the results to be good at an institution, there is need for proper management. So, with this, I think it will assist very much in managing institutions.

Similarly, **school leader 4** said that:

We are still studying them since the face to face would take a day or two okay a week but the modules were many, so we are supposed to keep studying them for life as long as we are in the profession.

This means that learning through CPDs is a continuous process that leaders need to adapt to and grow through their career life, agreeing with Ememe et al. (2013), who hypothesised that CPD is the name connoting a continuous means through which individuals in the job build on already acquired knowledge and understanding to sustain complex knowledge required to be

successful on their job. One cannot say that the knowledge I acquired three years back is enough since there are emerging issues as well as technology development which one needs to update the existing knowledge for the purpose of aligning with the demand of 21st century as Goa (2021) suggested, that educational institutions should understand CPD as the only procedure for maintenance, enhancement and widening of knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the performance of professional, managerial and technical duties throughout the working life of educational administrators and teachers.

4.2.3. Accumulated knowledge and skills

The data indicated that all leaders hailed the school leadership programme. Participants indicated the importance of the school leadership programme for capacitation in all areas of leadership and management. This is what **school leader 1** and **school leader 4** shared:

School leader 1:

You will agree with me that the school manager plays a big role in the sense that for discipline to be instituted in the school, there is need for the manager to be well equipped. For the results to be good at an institution, there is need for proper management. So, with this, I think it will assist very much in managing institutions.

Again, school leader 4:

We are still studying them since the face to face would take a day or two okay, a week but the modules were many, so we are supposed to keep studying them for life as long as we are in the profession. We cannot rely on what we learnt in college alone. Some of us we went to college twenty years ago.

Similarly, O2 said:

Yeah, CPDs impart knowledge and skills in leaders, at least they help the leaders with know-how, how to tackle various managerial leadership issues that come their way all that are associated with that's headship as well as deputy headship.

The data indicate that for effective administration of the schools, school leaders, especially those who have undergone the training and have been equipped with management and leadership skills, stand a better chance of managing schools effectively. School leaders are entrusted with a huge responsibility to support learners and teachers in achieving the institution's goals. The school leaders are further answerable for the overall management of the schools. Therefore, they need to be equipped with leadership and management skills, which could positively impact the performance and effectiveness of their schools.

4.2.4. Identify skill gaps

School leaders indicated that they identified skills and administration gaps as soon as they started the training and were able to see the benefits of the CPD. They highlighted areas where they need to improve in the duty station. The gaps were filled by the knowledge from the CPD.

School leader 4 said:

...but after arriving at the venue, we discovered that we really needed to attend this, yeah. A majority I interacted with, loved the content which we covered... the majority, those I interacted with, indicated that the training, the programme was quite profitable.

Correspondingly, **School leader 5** said:

When I was invited to attend this training, I was happy because I knew that it would cover up the administration gaps that were existing in me at that time and in fact, in fact, after I started, when I started attending this programme, I knew for sure that it was indeed addressing some of the gaps administratively that existed in me... But with EQUALS yes, it is true that they are interested in leaders so that they become effective and efficient and to do their duties in a humane manner.

The findings are consistent with Gyamfi et al. (2023), who revealed that school leaders expressed that their performance is dependent on the perception of professional development and understanding the importance of professional development as a job motivator.

School leader 4 said:

...but after arriving at the venue, we discovered that we really needed to attend this, yeah. a majority I interacted with, loved the content which we covered... the only challenge you know when a teacher and above all a leader sometimes you have the tendency of fearing an exam so some, managers felt like, oh! We are going to write an exam and we are going to be graded and this is quite challenging but otherwise the majority, those I interacted with, indicated that the training, the programme was quite profitable.

This is an indication that school leaders acknowledge the benefits of CPDs, which is why those close to retirement dates had ‘painful appreciation’ of the programme as they drew closer to their retirement dates. The findings further revealed that other school leaders were reluctant to participate at that time, because their retirement dates were imminent. This relaxation was not

negative, but rather positive, because they loved the programme but could not use the knowledge because of the time factor. Similarly, it was echoed by **school leader 5** at the time of data collection that some leaders who benefitted from the EQUALS CPD had already retired.

4.2.5. Professional Development opportunities due to digital technology use

The findings of this study as some participants revealed that among the professional development needs they have been provided with technological skills which has enabled them to lead schools in the digital century are congruent to the Technology Acceptance Model which call for school leaders and everyone to the acceptance of using the model to make decisions in participating in digital courses, programmes etc. agreeing with (Megginson and Whitaker, 2007) who revealed that the participants in that study said they are in an information age when technology is producing continual changes, they need to assess continually how these changes could help them to carry out their roles better.

In this study, participants added that leading schools in the 21st century requires school leaders who are knowledgeable in the current technologies since most of the activities they perform are undertaken online. Lack of capacity building in this area definitely leads to inefficiency in the management of the overall running of the school. Therefore, school leaders indicated that it was really important that they were equipped with technological skills to fit in and meet 21st-century school leadership and management demands.

School leader 5 indicated that:

The first opportunity and probably the greatest one is that it is easy for a leader to learn from others in diaspora, yeah and at the same time you can communicate with anybody

because technology has turned the world into a global village. A phone will carry all the books you need.

He added that:

even if your house may be small, you may not worry much as regards to where you can put the books or issues of money to purchase the needed books. So, there are a lot of CPD opportunities for leaders as far as technology is concerned.

School leaders 5 and 6 said:

A leader will be able to make research and give feedback within short time because of technical knowledge/ skills.

School leader 3 said that:

Through the phones you see a lot of courses which are being advertised online, aiding the leaders to do courses online.

He gave an example of UNICAF, which is offering online programmes and other institutions. So, there are a lot of opportunities. It becomes easy to share online materials. E-learning programme by the Ministry of Education, using his experience, he can encourage his colleagues to register because there was a programme in which school leaders were given a link that through the link the leaders could be doing CPDs online, which is convenient. As such, leaders can share more knowledge. He added that he saw some audio of ‘The Pearl’, which is a literary book in the senior section and the whole notes as well as the audio voice recorded. He felt that these days we are in the digital age; we cannot run away from technology.

School leader 2 said that:

At district level or divisional level, maybe sometimes we are able to be used as resource persons in other activities because they know that this person is at least advanced as such we are used as facilitators in other CPDs because of that particular knowledge as I said that to me it was not strange because I used it at Mzuzu University.

School leader 1 said:

As a leader there was now that chance where by you can play around with the issue of digital technology without problems, write reports, write proposals without any problems we are now at least equipped with those skills. We are able to apply without problems.

School leader 4 said:

Now, they are talking of using the computers or the phones for issues to do with examinations, meetings like zoom meetings. even the teaching of IT in our schools now as a manager, I understand and encourage them in a different way than before having attended the leadership training looking at the use of technology for the same, I can boldly say that this training has opened my mind to advance the teaching of IT in any school that the ministry can send me to. Yes, yes and even requesting for gadgets like laptops and establishing an ICT Lab in all the schools where I can go regardless of the smaller size that can be there, sure.

This shows that there is a mindset change in the daily practices of school leaders. It means that some leaders had negative attitudes toward issues related to technology use in schools due to limited knowledge or no knowledge and skills on technology use. It can be a representation of

a group of leaders who had the same attitude as indicated in the work of Durodolu (2016), who states that TAM is an information system theory that propagates stages to be followed by informing seekers or learners in the acceptance, inculcating and utilisation of new technology to achieve information literacy skills which is the basic idea of Technology Acceptance Model to investigate the effects of technology on user behavior. Therefore, it can be said that the model works towards mindset change in the use of technology in the lives of both leaders and teachers in schools. Leaders, therefore, need to be equipped with skills and knowledge in all areas, which in turn will improve the quality of teaching and learning.

4.3. The extent to which the content of the CPD affects secondary school leaders' leadership roles in their institutions.

This objective aimed at determining the extent to which the content of CPD affects secondary school leaders' leadership roles. Leaders were asked the extent to which the content of the EQUALS School Leadership Programme was affecting their leadership roles. The data revealed that the EQUALS School Leadership Programme was essential for the leaders. Both experienced and inexperienced leaders are in demand of the CPD by EQUALS. They expressed and appreciated the organisers' initiative to come in and train the school leaders. The knowledge they have acquired from the leadership programme will have a lasting impact on school leaders, consequently improving schools as pursued by the ministry, contributing towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on the provision of quality education and lifelong learning (MoE, 2018).

4.3.1. Leadership and Management

The findings reveal that school leaders need managerial skills to handle institutions. They appreciated the content of the training modules, which covered at least every area of the leadership and management of institutions. This is in line with the findings of Abbasi & David (2021) which revealed that CPD is still needed in UAE on educational outcomes which focuses on equipping educators with skills, strategies, and knowledge to directly improve student learning and achievement. They said that they will be able to manage schools properly with the skills they have been equipped with.

School leader 1 said:

The emphasis is mainly on school management. That's the major emphasis. You will agree with me that the school manager plays a big role in the sense that for discipline to be instituted in the school, there is need for the manager to be well equipped. For the results to be good at an institution, there is need for proper management. So, with this, I think it will assist, it will assist very much in managing institutions.

He added that different modules were helpful that cover management. The emphasis was on management. They looked at a manager in general, policies, thus, readmission policy. They also emphasised much on the leadership skills, which is a situational-driven phenomenon. Some modules covered how to curb indiscipline issues like bullying, although this time they are reducing, but still leaders need to keep on sensitising the learners about the badness of that behaviour, and inclusive learning.

On the same, **leader 3** echoed that:

With the knowledge, real life situations can be handled because all the avenues were covered.

When one of the organisers was asked about how they got the needs of school leaders, he indicated that:

In that case, we did come up with a number of areas that were added by the Ministry as where members were having gaps, those who are heading schools. Some of the areas they moved into to address are records management, supervision, inclusive environment, strategic planning, policies etc.

The findings reveal that leaders have gained managerial skills where by all areas of leadership and management were covered aligning with the work of Beyer (2009), who argues that school leadership programmes address issues such as management of human and financial resources, school leadership orientations, school laws, curriculum development and planning at the school level, problem-solving skills, school-based decision making, application of information, and communication technology in schools. The findings are also in consistency with Suaka and Kuranchie (2018) who reported that CPD programmes have affected their managerial skills as well as professional growth and development.

4.3.2. Diversity management in schools

One of the skills participants mentioned was diversity in schools. They said that there are age gaps in the schools, which cause difficulties in handling them. But with the EQUALS programme, they have been helped to handle diversity in schools.

School leader 3 said that:

We have developed skills on how we can handle teachers despite age differences i.e. novice, middle and long serving teachers put together under one leader. The skills help us to blend so that we can bring them together at the end of the day we are able to progress well as a school.

This was echoed in the response of **teacher 1 of school 3**, who explained that:

Our school is a mixture of old timers and new timers so, most of the times when we have caucus he tries to clarify some of the protocols in the system what we are supposed to do if you have an issue where can you go about that issue, and when it comes to teaching whether lesson planning schemes most of the times on, ah, ah, when we have small meetings he always encourages us and direct us on how to go about issues, yeah.

The findings reveal unique responses from some participants who talked of diversity management which is scarce in literature reviewed by the researcher. This means that the knowledge that leaders acquired from this training was enormous and included unique areas of managing schools. This reveals why some researchers have appreciated CPDs of school leaders as indicated by (Frendo, 2023).

4.3.3. Data management

Some participants revealed that they had challenges with how they could generate and manage data. Data management is one of the skills that school leaders need to have to handle institutions properly. With the school leadership programme, school leaders are able to generate data and update the records properly and they are able to archive and retrieve when needed.

School leader 3 said:

The courses were very beneficial because they are able to guide us in data management.

Data management is how we can be able to ensure that we have all the data in place in schools where we are able to archive others that may be resourced at one point in time.

School leaders 6 shared this:

We were also trained to have updated records on everything that is happening at the institution i.e. supervision records of teaching and learning.

Concurring with **school leaders 3** and **6**, **O1** indicated that:

One area was of records management. There were challenges that school leaders had in terms of how they can generate records and more importantly how they can make those records as vehicles for decision making so that the decisions they make at the school, are being informed by the records of learning.

From the quotes above, the participants revealed that the EQUALS School Leadership Programme addressed issues such as management data which incorporates communication technology learning and programme evaluations (Beyer, 2009). So, they found that the courses were beneficial, as indicated in the work of Gyamfi et al. (2023). Globally, CPD is said to have a massive impact on secondary school administrators. This means that school leaders' CPD is of great value to secondary school leaders. An implication that every country cannot do without the component of CPD in the education sector. This is in line with the findings of (Ndhlumayo & Mabeleng, 2025) whereby the participants revealed that among the professional development needs they wish to be provided with the technological skills to enable them to lead schools in the 21st century. The participants in that study added that leading schools in the

21st century require school leaders who are knowledgeable in technologies, as most of the activities they perform are undertaken online. This need is line with Technology Acceptance Model, as a theory, it commands individuals to accept the use of technology due to the technological issues emerging in the world. Building on this fact, the knowledge of Information Literacy is important because access to information is driven by technology which must be learnt for an individual to be a competent information user (Encyclopedia Britannica 2010).

One of the dimensions of TAM is that it predicts the behavior of users towards potential acceptance of or rejection of the model which has been confirmed by numerous studies of its strength on user applicability (Vankatesh et al., 2003).

4.3.4. Inclusive education

The findings are in consistence with the work of Mashaya et al. (2022) who reported that School leaders were able to manage school resources, teachers viewed professional development as a tool that enabled school leaders to create a collaborative and inclusive learning environment aligning with the findings of this study whereby the data revealed that participants had challenges with inclusive education. With the skills equipped through the programme, the leaders are able to manage schools with inclusiveness.

It was indicated by **O1** that:

There was also a challenge that most schools are unable to create an inclusive environment.

Concurring with **O1, School leaders 3** and **1** said:

On inclusive education the course was presented in a way that the module cemented everything exposing the gaps that we had as managers. Now we are able to understand our students better and identify students with special needs using different categories than before.

This means that the gap in the area of inclusive education, is filled with the knowledge and skills acquired through the EQUALS School Leadership Programme.

Although inclusive education as a course was incorporated in this training, it shows that sometimes issues of inclusiveness are partially considered when planning. One of the school leaders indicated that being a visually impaired participant, along with the other two who were participating in this programme, had no materials in braille. He said:

In the entire training period, one major barrier is that as you are interviewing me am sure you notice that I am one of the visually impaired, now the barrier that I encountered is that modules were not in braille and up to now modules are not in braille so me, like any other person who is blind...and another friend...We were three of us who were blind in the course but we did not have materials in braille. So, this was a big challenge.

This implies that the organisers of the programme did not consider preparation for the materials of participants with visual impairment, which in one way or another affected their learning. Much of the elements were considered in the organisation of the programme, which is crucial as far as inclusive education is concerned. It has to start from the higher levels of education to the lowest, which is the early childhood development. If it cannot be put into consideration at a level where there are few people, how then can it be considered at lower levels where there

are many in that category? Additionally, with the issue of technology, modules can be recorded for those who are visually impaired so that they do not struggle.

4.3.5. Challenges in schools in terms of resources

The findings revealed that school leaders were encouraged that they should be able to merge policies and understand leadership from a policy point of view, and should be able to motivate staff to work in a very difficult environment corresponding to the findings of Sonola and Shayo (2025); Farrelly and Mwinuka (2023) who argue that insufficient funds for school leaders is an obstacle to implement skills gained.

School leader 3 echoed that:

The content is trying to actually support leaders to align themselves to contemporary leadership issues as indicated that CPDs are for the purpose of aligning with the demand of 21st century.

Goa (2021) suggested that, educational institutions should understand CPD as the only procedure for maintenance, enhancement and widening of knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the performance of professional, managerial and technical duties throughout the working life of educational administrators and teachers. In agreement with what the leader said that leadership has become more challenging these days because leaders are working in an environment where they are constrained in terms of resources in their institutions as such, leaders who are very innovative, creative and equipped with skills are in high demand.

This is evident in the findings of Zamula (2019), that financial resource was a major challenge in school leader preparation and that resources had been decentralised whereby schools were cost centers and that the division lacked enough money and relied on schools for major events like school leader trainings as such this applies to general resources for the school as indicated by one leader that a motivated staff is needed to adapt to situations like these in institutions. This again is in line with the findings of Devos et al. (2018), who state that school leaders have to deal with the challenging task of socio-economic changes and high accountability, which makes the job complex and stressful. So, leaders think that they have been equipped with good skills by the EQUALS School Leadership Programme.

4.3.6. Conducting research within the school

The data revealed that school leaders must be conducting research within the school a topic which was new to some. The findings from the research made by school leaders, help them to make informed decisions based on facts which aligns to the findings of Bryk et al. (2010) which asserts that professional development assists school leaders in acquiring the ability to make decisions based on facts, which is basic for school improvement.

School leader 3 said that:

We were taught to be conducting research concerning our institutions. In that research we should find out what brings our schools down and solutions as we progress in the school. It was quite a very important training. This was new to me, I appreciate so much.

This is an indication that the school leaders received what they needed most and that they have been ironed to deal with the complexities of their position. The data indicate that the gaps that school leaders had were filled by the skills and knowledge they had been equipped with.

4.3.7. Policies and reforms

Another thing that came out is the issue of policies and reforms. Some school leaders also shared similar experiences, just as **school leader 3**, which were in line with one of the organisers' explanations.

O1 indicated that:

There was also a gap where we felt that most school leaders were not aware of the policies that are at higher level and therefore they would have challenges in implementing the same, so we moved in to address that through the curriculum that we developed.

School leader 3 indicated that:

At my level, the knowledge I got I never had before like on policies and reforms. I didn't know that we have a role to report to the policy makers to change things when they are not working. In addition to this, policies were something which were vague in our understanding but I think with this course we have been informed.

The findings agree with the gap that the MoE in Malawi found in the school leaders and looked forward to the organisers to fill with relevant knowledge and skills. Knowing that sometimes teachers are promoted to leadership positions without formal training, it was necessary to include this area in the CPD which in countries like Germany, the government expects leaders to have some management experience through special duties during their time as teachers or qualification through further studies, a country where school leaders do not have formal training (Tulowitzki, 2015) just as in Malawi. This has similar challenges in the daily roles and practices of school leaders as established in the work of Klein & Schwaneberg (2020) that a

certain number of school leaders lack thorough knowledge specifically revolving school leadership.

This means that some policies are not understood by members of staff. So, when these teachers are promoted to leadership positions, it becomes a big challenge since the leader who is expected to interpret the policies has limited knowledge and does not understand them. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, through policymakers, needs to provide interpretation of the policies to school leaders so that everyone in the school knows the dos and the don'ts.

As it is indicated by **teacher 2** from **school 4** that:

When there is a new policy and the like, sometimes, we have CPDs. I can just say we have CPDs for those things that they see we can have difficulties in understanding and the like so that we should spend much time.

The issue of policies was also echoed by **teacher 1** from **school 1**, who said:

We are happy because when there is a new policy or those policies which we don't know, he is able to communicate. So, it is like that gives us an awareness of what we are supposed to do or not to do. Because we know that a policy is something everyone is supposed to follow so we are told about the policies. May be the policies which we didn't know we are able to know through that communication. If we don't understand, he explains making sure that everyone is aware of what is supposed to be done or not.

This means that teachers look up to the school leader to interpret the policies; therefore, leaders need to be well-informed and conversant with such crucial issues. When the leaders are well informed, even on policies that are not working out, they can be confident to report to relevant

officials for amendment, creating an environment that is feasible in the school, hence school improvement.

The findings present the overwhelming significance of the CPD. Leaders have overwhelmingly appreciated the content of the modules for the training. Whatever leaders need in their complex position has been presented to them. It is up to individual leaders in their respective duty stations to apply to real-life situations as they lead and manage schools in pursuit of school improvement.

In a corresponding voice, **school leader 4** indicated that the content helped him very much and is still helping him. He said that he has the modules in his office and that he refers to them whenever he faces any issue. He added that they are still studying them as the face-to-face would take just a day, two, or a week, but the modules were many, which could not be deeply covered. Leaders are required to keep studying the modules for life as long as they are in the profession in line with the argument made by Mehmet (2020) and Gyamfi et al. (2023), that this is a lifelong process based on experiential and theoretical methods which combine different methodologies to learning, which includes training courses, lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences and events and webinars. This is an indication that CPDs are of high value to secondary school leaders and effective leaders depend on them.

4.4. Experiences of teachers under school leaders who underwent the EQUALS school leadership programme

Objective four was to find out the experiences of the participants under school leaders who underwent CPD through the EQUALS School Leadership Programme. The teachers were asked to indicate whether school leaders who have gone through the EQUALS school

leadership programme acquired relevant managerial skills or not. It was necessary to ask this of the teachers because they are the main beneficiaries of school leaders' professional development. According to the findings, there are several leadership skills and practices that the participating teachers are continuously experiencing from their school leaders in their respective duty stations across NED.

4.4.1. Delegation/teacher involvement

The teachers were asked to indicate whether school leaders who have gone through the EQUALS School Leadership Programme (continuous professional development) acquired relevant managerial skills or not. It was necessary to ask this of the teachers because they are the main beneficiaries of school leaders' professional development.

The study revealed that delegation and teacher involvement are crucial insofar as leadership practices that motivate teachers in their day-to-day duties are concerned, as mentioned by eight out of twelve teachers. Delegation is one of the school leaders' practices that most leaders across NED use to motivate teachers, hence quality teaching and in return school improvement. Involvement and participation in responsibilities by stakeholders like teachers, in this sense, indicates democracy and fosters a sense of ownership. It serves a motivation to everyone as such every teacher works towards achievement of school objectives and goals.

Teacher 1 school 1 said:

He delegates the leadership roles like leading assemblies instead of him doing it. I think that the teachers are happy I am happy too.

This concurs with what **teacher 2 from school 1** indicated:

Sometimes, he delegates other duties. As an institution we are different and everyone has his/her own perspective but as for me, overall, I am happy.

Teacher 1 school 3 said:

He involves us conducting different activities in the school. We are involved in most of the activities. The work that he is supposed to do, most of the times he delegates and supervises. Like classroom observations we can take classroom observations. we do a lot of classroom observations he has impacted us when... if you can ask each and everyone here, he or she will tell you that she/ he is able to supervise and can supervise very well.

Teacher 2 school 4 said:

Most of the times he delegates. He doesn't do it on his own, but first of all, he recognises your capabilities and gives you the task according to your capabilities.

The study revealed that school leaders did not differ much in their demonstration of delegation skills and that when teachers are delegated and involved in the daily endeavors of the school, they become motivated and as a result, work towards quality teaching to achieve improvement of the school. This agrees with Ogoti (2022), who argues that delegation of responsibility has become a focal point in improving the quality of education in public secondary schools across the globe. According to Ayeni (2020), delegates perform the allocated task for which they have competence and talents, this is in relation to the complement of **teacher 2 school 4** in her words “he doesn't do it on his own but first of all he recognises your capability and gives you the task according to your capability.” In institutions where teachers are not involved and delegated,

they are discouraged and not happy, as a result, working towards school improvement is demoralised. The concern of teachers in this current study agrees with what Lightfoot (1986) also indicated three decades ago, that empowerment builds teacher commitment and involvement. When teachers realise and accept their own lack of power, especially with the many mandates that go along with accountability measures and autocratic school leaders, their potential for improved performance and job satisfaction is diminished. In the words of two out of 12 participating teachers, they don't know anything about the daily management of funds. They feel not involved in the daily running of the affairs, resulting in frustration. When people don't know what is happening, speculations are born and, in most cases, you find people here and there talking about how they are not being involved, having their needs neglected. In such circumstances, teachers often have little to say about what happens in their schools, leaving them with a sense of powerlessness, which certainly does not promote their enthusiastic acceptance of daily work and their improved performance.

This means that both the old-timers and the current teachers need to be delegated and be involved in the institution. This makes them feel part of the institution. School leaders need to engage delegation which is also called distribution which is understood as key competence and practice for school leaders. Bush et al. (2022) established that the findings on the papers on distributed leadership as examined for the review they did indicate considerable interest in this model in Africa.

The implication is that school leaders, as drivers of academic success, need to know that delegation or distribution or teacher involvement is one of the key motivators for teachers therefore, they use it to the best of their knowledge to improve schools across the Northern Education Division.

4.4.2. Creating an environment for professional development

The findings of Hilton et al. (2015) established that in general, research about teachers has drawn attention to the importance of strong leadership to promote teachers growth. This fact relates to the findings of this study whereby teachers experience creation of environment for professional development. Based on the data gathered from the participants, a general theme that indicates the need for school leaders to be conscious of their role in creating an enabling environment for teachers emerged. Within this theme, it was discovered that positive school culture is crucial for teachers, *“we are being motivated through encouragement and teachings to promote our work.”*

Two teachers from schools 2 and 6 said:

School leaders conducting CPDs/meetings and one in particular said:

The school leader conducts meetings and CPDs and gives us information on how we can be leaders and we participate with the school leader.

This is in agreement with Ellett and Teddle (2003), who argue that since school leaders are responsible for schools’ improvement, they ought to develop their staff to reach their highest performance in line with the work of Nahid et al. (2023), when instructors are given the chance to develop their knowledge, skills, and pedagogical practices, they feel more empowered and confident in their ability to conduct good instruction. However, some studies have indicated that school leaders struggle to find ways to create school climates that are supportive of teachers’ growth which promote improved practice (Drago-Servason, 2012). This argument plainly points to essential knowledge and skills needed by school leaders about how climates are created and strategies employed by effective school leaders.

4.4.3. Dedication

The study revealed that school leaders are dedicated in their duties because 11 out of the 12 participating teachers experience the same thing. The indicators of school leaders' dedication are revealed in the responses made by the 11 participating teachers as follows.

School 2 teacher 1 said:

The school leader is always showing up in whatever need which is there and makes sure issues are solved in good time unless commitment with the office.

School 2 teacher 2 said:

The school leader is always available when highly needed and I can be late, but most of the times I can find her here doing this, doing that.

School 4 teacher 1 reported that:

He is dedicated. He is never busy. He is never tired of us.

All 12 participating teachers experience the same thing. As they presented their views, it showed that teachers are happy with the way the school leaders practice their roles in the school. This is in line with the findings of Bush (2008) who asserts that in the reviewed literature he conducted, the change in school leaders is confirmed in the zeal they have by the members upon return from CPD. The implication of this is that when teachers are happy, they are motivated, and as such, they work hard towards quality teaching hence improvement of the school.

4.4.4. Management of school finances

The study revealed that finances are well handled by most school leaders. This is evident from the responses made by the participating teachers. 8 out of 12 teachers indicated that the way

their school leaders handle finances; everyone is happy at their duty station. This point came out sharply in the sense that teachers are involved, and they know what is happening at the institution.

However, the study further revealed that accountability by some school leaders is overlooked. Although some school leaders overlook accountability, the school leaders are at the focal point of management of everything in the school, in the sense that the success of any education system depends largely on the quality management style made available to the services of that school. Therefore, proper management of everything in the school, including finances, is a must. Below is a discussion on the management of finances.

School 6 teacher 2 said:

At this school and possibly may be all schools there is this committee known as IPC (Internal Procurement Committee), ... so whenever there are some items which need to be bought, the IPC is summoned to meet by him to say we need to buy ABCD. So, the committee sits down and I am one of the committee members being the HOD of science here. So, we have agreed about the prices, then we report to him then he just approves then we buy such things, sure.

This is in agreement with what **teacher 1 from school 3** said:

On procurement, since we have IPC Committee, because they are the ones who deal with procuring resources at schools most of the times the IPC sits down and make decisions, yeah that we will purchase the resources at this place, these are the suppliers, IPC is involved, yeah, yeah.

However, some teachers went an extra mile to talk about other stakeholders who are involved, apart from the IPC.

Teacher 1 school 2 indicated that:

...usually, we see there is a meeting for management may be making a budget planning what to be bought. We have development activities now they are building a house for the head teacher outside, there, yeah so, all materials are being bought involving the PTA and SMC Committee. Whenever, the leader is going to make purchase or budget for development, she always invites the PTA and the SMC they are aware of what is happening. On those purchases, yeah.

This agrees with what **teacher 2 from school 2** said:

Most of the times the stakeholders are called if there...because there are some small procurement like chalk we cannot always call the stakeholders but if there are big, big, procurement, they are always called and told that the school wants to do this, this, so she will seek consent form the stake holders.

Contrary to the experiences of teachers from **schools 2, 3, 4, and 6**, the experiences that make members of staff uncomfortable and not happy with what is happening at their school. This is evident from their views as follows:

Teacher 2 from school 5 said:

Most people feel they are left out, they are not happy with handling of finances. Just in the daily management of funds, so, that is the general view which I hear from teachers in most cases, even the, you talk of not only teachers even the support staff. They feel

not involved in the daily running of the affairs. So, most of them are frustrated, they don't know what is happening. You know when they don't know what is happening, they sometimes have speculations, yeah so that is what I can say is that in most cases, you find people here and there talking about how they are not being involved it is more like their needs are neglected and so on, sure, that's what I can say... As management members to say let us sit here, how do we manage the school, how to move forward those issues don't usually happen, so, there is a gap, just to be open, there is a gap. Members are not very conversant with what is happening, yeah, sure.

This concurs with what **Teacher 2 from school 5** said:

In terms of procurement, there is no involvement of the procurement committee. He emphasised that when it comes to procurement, involvement of other members like the IPC members is not much and added that it is usually the bursar and maybe with the deputy who just go and buy these. He further said that other members don't know what is happening.

This means that when people are not involved, they are not happy, and they speculate things that sometimes are not there, as such mistrust emerges between school leaders and teachers. The implication is that school leaders need to be cautious of the way they handle finances. If there is involvement and reports on what is happening, teachers feel part of the institution, as everyone is taken on board, they cannot question anything because they know how financial management is done. Since they know what is happening and how, this motivates them, hence quality teaching and school improvement.

4.4.5. Supervising/ monitoring the teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning

Another theme that emerged during the interviews was supervising/monitoring teachers in schools to ensure effective teaching and learning. The researcher wanted to know how school leaders were able to monitor/supervise teachers at the school, and they said the following:

Teacher 1 school 1, teacher 1 from school 3 said:

He goes to class to supervise teachers. Apart from supervising teachers he also goes around monitoring the activities that are taking place may be to check if we teachers, we are in class teaching although this is the work of deputy responsible for academics but even, he, himself goes around.

Apart from that, there is also a period register. They will see if you are teaching or not teaching. If you haven't gone to class students will write, not taught. So, the school is able to know that this one did not go to class. If you have given an exercise, they will indicate that teacher did not come to class, he just gave us an exercise.

In agreement with this, **teacher 1 from school 5** also said that the school leader can supervise, he goes around whenever it is time for classes. He moves around to check whether students are learning in class. He also supervises in terms of punctuality. This is done using the time books there to monitor how teachers are reporting for duties. He also supervises in terms of teacher attendance. Whenever the teacher is not around, he can monitor where that person is by making follow-ups.

Teacher 2 from school 4 indicated that:

Teachers need more time for supervision because they help a lot.

Teacher 1 school 2 said:

Usually, school-based supervision is done twice a term, which involves the school leader, the deputy and heads of departments. She said that more should be done. If it could be done fortnightly or for a term, four or five times. She said that she thinks it could help that way because sometimes some teachers tend to relax, so maybe if they are being supervised by these authorities, they might wake up and try to work hard rather than leaving them for a long period of time. Sometimes teachers relax but when they are being supervised, they are awakened up to work hard.

Teacher 1 from school 5 said:

*He can monitor what is happening in the institution to say this area, what is happening?
Can you give me an update on this, so, supervision is just fine.*

The findings reveal that supervision is core in every school where the participating teachers are. Teachers show that they are happy when they are supervised. Some recommended that they should do more supervision by doing it regularly. This is evident in the words of some teachers. The findings show that supervision is done in all schools. The experience of teachers with supervision is positive. In fact, they need to be supervised regularly, as in the words of one participating teacher from **school 6** who said:

It is through that supervision that we learn more that we can improve on our teaching.

4.4.6. Communication

The findings of this study is consistence with the findings of (Forssten Seiser, 2017) asserts that the programme had impact on school leaders' school daily life such that changes were easily noticeable. For example, one school leader, a team player advocates distributed power

and leadership. This is indicated by open communication system which contributed to a favourable climate and relational trust among her colleagues. The teachers confirmed the changes in their school leader by describing how their school leader created rules and routines for communication and decision making, challenging the school's informal organisation just as participating teachers in this study highlighted the importance of open communication to say that everyone is taken on board. They unanimously viewed that communication is up to date in their duty stations except for two schools where some information was hidden from concerned teachers and where issues of finance are not open to the school. The need for communication could not be overemphasized insofar as school improvement, quality teaching, and learning are concerned. It is very crucial, and for effective school leadership, a variety of skills are in demand, including communication. Teachers, along with support staff, need to be effectively communicated. When people know what is happening at the school, they are motivated, and they feel part of the institution. This enables the teachers to participate fully in the achievement of the organizational goals. This does not mean that teachers should undermine their school leader.

Teacher 1 from school 1 said:

We are happy because when there is a new policy or those policies which we don't know, he is able to communicate. So, it is like that gives us an awareness of what we are supposed to do or not to do. Because we know that a policy is something we are supposed all to follow so we are told about the policies. May be the policies which we didn't know we are able to know through that communication. If we don't understand, he explains making sure that everyone is aware of what is supposed to be done or not.

Contrary to what **teacher 1** from **school 1** experiences, **teacher 2** from **school 5** indicated that:

The biggest challenge and in terms of aah, the other challenge would be in terms of involvement of aah the management team in terms of the management of maybe funds in the school is just important for information's sake to say people should know what is happening, yeah so that...

Concurring with this, **teacher 2 from school 2** said:

Regularly, when a new thing emerges, first of all, she calls them as teachers, brief them then from there it's when it goes to the students. However, she expressed concern on an issue on promotion whereby information was hidden to the concerned teachers. They were not happy because in other schools their fellow teachers accessed that information from their school leaders in the same zone.

The findings agree with what Ärlestig (2007) found two decades ago, that through communication, the school leader steers and unites his or her staff members in the work necessary for academic results and school improvement which Plessis & So-oabeb (2023) in their findings call effective communication. This implies that effective communication in the workplace is crucial and therefore needs to be created and maintained; otherwise, misunderstandings can arise that create communication barriers. In agreement with the findings, Varma et al. (2021) state that communication disorders not only distort growth and progress in the workplace but also cause anger, misinterpretation, despair, and loss of trust and respect, resulting in an unhealthy atmosphere in the workplace.

This means that educational leaders who communicate openly without hiding information create an environment where trust can develop. This demands transparent communication,

sharing information about decisions, policies, and plans which allow stake holders to feel informed and involved. This encourages the individuals to contribute their best efforts because they feel valued and included, unlike in schools where some information is hidden.

4.4.7. Influence on teachers to achieve common objectives

The study revealed that most school leaders focus on organisational goals. They influence teachers to work towards goals set by the school.

Teacher 1 from school 1 said:

We have a good environment that we can learn, it's more like training in terms of what he does in his leadership.

4.4.8. Setting high performance standards and expectations for teachers and students

The data revealed that school leaders set high performance standards whereby the school leader promises awards to the performing teachers. Additionally, they set the number of points for students' final exams results.

Teacher 1 school 2 said:

The school leader promises awards to performing teachers. In that way, teachers are being encouraged to work hard like, this year we should have the first student in form four with good points.

Teacher 2 school 6 said:

The school leader sets institutional goals to be achieved collaboratively. We agree together the number of points that we need the first student to get. Every teacher works towards that achieving that goal.

4.4.9. Creating collaborative culture and teamwork

In a school system, it is very important that the members of the staff work as a team for effective teaching and learning. In this regard, teachers were asked how they were assisted to work jointly as a team. The findings of this study confirms the findings of Mashaya et al., 2022 which asserted that professionally developed school leaders have the ability to create a collaborative and inclusive learning environment (Mashaya et al., 2022).

Teacher 2 school 2 indicated:

Most of the times the leader encourages us to do joint planning, sometimes joint teaching so that the child benefits and also with the school leader. In addition to joint planning, we also have remedial lessons whereby teachers follow timetable that indicate that each teacher has a day to teach remedial lessons.

Similar explanations came from participating teachers from 6 selected schools across NED.

Most of the times because on objectives to be achieved means teachers are supposed to be there teaching. So, most of the times he encourages us we are not to miss classes, yeah.

Teacher 1 school 3 explained that:

He is good. At first, I said he is democratic whereby everyone at school is involved so when a leader is doing that it gives peace to the, to what...to other teachers. We cannot be divided because it's like we are almost together, one family in each and every situation that is there, yeah. So, I think, that's very good rather than having min meetings like the school should be divided these are doing their own things and these are doing their own things, it doesn't sound good but with his leadership at least we are, we are..., we work as a family where there is an issue where someone has not aah, where someone is not doing good at least we try to be together to sort out the issue and then move on, yeah.

Agreeing with teachers from other schools, **teacher 1** from **school 5** indicated that his school leader enforces writing of schemes and lesson plans, through HODs and the leaders of academics, so when teachers show some resistance, caucuses are held to encourage teachers in terms of scheming. In terms of supervision, he moves around to see if teaching and learning are taking place.

This means that leaders across NED are doing a commendable job since supervision is another important factor that fosters school improvement. When teachers work collaboratively towards achieving set goals, student outcome improves because there is no way, the entire school can plan to fail. In this sense, school leaders need to continue with this practice as it has emerged as one of the core factors towards school improvement.

School leader 1 from school 1 said:

“Now that we were equipped with those management skills, you find that those issues are less. Because we can handle the teachers in the right manner. It is not a matter of authoritarian. You need to sit and talk. Now, that one, teachers will always accept, I think we have been taken as people because in those days we just forced and shouted but with this training no! no! no! it is discouraging that those days are gone when we used to shout.”

This statement implies that when school leaders are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, schools will achieve school-set goals significantly, resulting in school improvement. This was also echoed in the response of **teacher 2 from school 3** who expressed anger that: His leader is the kind who, when he proposes something for teachers to do, usually uses an authoritative leadership style to make sure everybody participates in that thing. Sometimes, if some staff members are not willing usually, he uses authoritative style to handle those guys at least to achieve everyone’s participation in that thing.

In his actual words, he said:

Of course, there are some things which make us happy but some things don’t make us happy you know because sometimes with ... like for me, I like a person who wants me to do something and at the same time he should also be able to listen to my views, yes, if he respects that, at least it can make me happy rather than if you propose something, try maybe to have an idea, the leader cancels everything as if he had already made up his mind, that’s how I feel as an individual. My fellow teachers also have the same perceptions as mine most of them of course usually...

This indicates that teachers do not need to be forced to do something, shouted at or command them in participating in something. As alluded to by **school leader 1 from school 1**, “there is need to sit down with teachers and talk on issues which is called contact and dialogue.” Confirming the perception of teachers that professional development is a tool that enabled school leaders to handle institutions professionally.

4.4.10. Motivation in the day-to-day practices of the school leader

The findings confirm the findings of Tulowitzki (2015) which revealed that there is a group of school leaders who have challenges managing the schools because they did not have formal training as such, school leaders are encouraged to participate in further trainings which are offered by universities usually designed to prepare teachers for school leadership positions.

O1 said that:

We moved in when we noted that most school leaders given that they were not trained initially leadership skills in terms of how they can motivate staff can be a challenge.

Teacher1 in school 1 explained that:

On the CPDs what I should say is that for that one to take place, the school need to give teachers something, like you... like teachers benefit two things: knowledge and also what skills, (laughing) apart from Knowledge and skills, there is also (laughing) a monetary ... laughing yeah, it's both....so, whenever there is a CPD, you see teachers happy, we are motivated, 100% motivated because we get the knowledge, the skills but at the same time, a little something. So, it's like, we know they are costly because we are many, yeah. So, when there is such a thing, we are happy. You go to class highly motivated; you have the knowledge and at least (a sign of money while laughing).

Teacher 2 school 3 stated that:

Most of the times we are involved in a number of issues. I have that interest to perform better, yeah. When someone is doing good maybe on performances, the person is always applauded by him. He is a person... I have that interest to do good more so that I can be appreciated.

Teacher 2 school 5 said:

Motivation is there in terms of creating a friendly environment at the school. He is just very good. We don't work in a negative environment. We feel very motivated to come to work and do the work because the environment is friendly. You know when a leader is positive that positive energy is transferred to all the members at the institution. So, there is positive energy. We are able to work and we are motivated.

Teacher 1 school 6 indicated that:

As a Head of Department, I am really motivated in the sense that whenever I raise issues in terms shortage of materials in the department he quickly comes in and supply us with such materials. Because you know science is Most of the lessons are practical so normally, when we need to conduct practical lessons, teaching and learning materials are readily available, sure.

This is in line with effective leadership, which plays a vital role in teacher motivation. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), supportive and transformational leadership styles positively impact teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance. When school administrators actively recognise and appreciate teachers' efforts, it fosters a positive work

environment and motivates teachers to excel. This point is quite clear that teachers' commitment in the school stands on a direct coordination of school leadership practices.

Teachers 1 and 2 in school 3, contrary to what other teachers said, explained that:

Partially, I am motivated, partially, partially, because sometimes I think the way he handles things maybe it's what he believes that he can get us in the right direction so, maybe, if we can get to that one, he will be good but somehow, I get motivated. I feel to be over controlled such that I get myself that I can't contribute anything I can't do anything ah, I can't have a direct impact in terms of decision so, sometimes I feel like I am over controlled which makes me to somehow get tempted to think that I should just work hard now and later quit this profession, sometimes I just feel like that. But on the other hand, that's the way things are. You know sometimes, when you are in a place you need to be valued, yeah!

Concurring with **teacher 2 in school 3**, **O2** indicated that:

There are some leaders who will respond positively and things will change on the ground but there others who still continue their usual way of doing business, yeah. So, in such situations, it is like the issue of negligence and over concentrating on one area as such, when they come for management meeting, we remind them by deliberately talking about the areas where we have noted across several schools that we have visited so we bring them up again at the meeting so that they benefit even those who may not have been visited but they also have such situations and then we mention serious recommendations.

This implies that while the school environments are healthy, there are also some issues. One out of the 12 participating teachers experienced a harsh environment, while another participating teacher experienced a healthy environment in the same school. When one out of twelve is converted to a percentage, it is 8% and as a fraction, it is $\frac{2}{25}$. This looks small, but it can have a huge impact on student outcomes in the sense that an individual can mobilise others to resist anything from the leader affecting students' learning, resulting in poor performance of the students.

Therefore, care should be taken in handling teachers because a dull learning environment can be fostered by uninspired teachers, which would lower students' achievement (Nahid et al., 2023).

Antoniou and Kyriakidou (2018) discovered a strong positive correlation between teacher motivation and work satisfaction. They added that students also profit from motivated teachers because they are more dedicated to their profession, since they feel appreciated and encouraged by their institutions. As such, motivated teachers can encourage students to actively participate in their scholarly adventure and achieve higher levels of educational attainment by advancing strong relationships between teachers and students, providing profitable learning opportunities, cultivating self-determination and acknowledging accomplishments (Nahid et al., 2023).

This means that teacher motivation is crucial as far as school improvement is concerned. Since the area of staff motivation was covered during the training, the organisers and the Ministry of Education are optimistic that school leaders have improved knowledge on how to motivate staff. They handle them in a desired way in line with effective leadership practices.

4.4.11. Patience

Teacher 1 school 2 indicated that:

Aaaah, the school leader's leadership style is accommodative not authoritative because there is no harshness in most of the issues, the leader tries to consult, yeah. There are some teachers maybe are not behaving well, because we had several cases here, if we had some school leaders those cases would have gone very far. But our leader tries to manage those issues so to my thinking, the leader is accommodative and not authoritative since everyone is accommodated non-harsh decisions.

The findings revealed another unique issue on the patience of the leader. Accommodating difficult people while handling issues at the school level instead of reporting to higher authorities. This shows that the leader is well equipped with skills, and knowledge, as well as maturity, which the EQUALS programme provided to the leaders. This indicates that issues will not be piling up at the EDM's office because leaders are well versed in their duties.

4.4.12. Approachability of the school leader

Participants had the following to say:

Teacher 1 school 2 reported that:

She is very much approachable, yeah. Very free! In my case when maybe I have some personal problems which may affect my work or duty, when I try to consult her, she tries to give advice and may be help me how to solve that issue.

Teacher 2 school 2 said:

Most of the times the school leader is free when you have a problem, the leader will open up and guide you. Most of the times as a teacher with a particular position, we almost work together, so, to me the leader opens up.

Teacher 1 school 1 indicated that:

Yes, he is approachable. It's like maybe there are some things that we ask for help for guidance. He is always available to respond.

The findings revealed another issue of approachability through the participating teachers. It showed that ultimately, the programme has made a better work environment where teachers feel that leadership is approachable and their ideas are respected and contribute to the success of their schools. In such an environment, teachers are motivated and feel part of the institution, which results in a working spirit.

4.4.13. Recommendations of the school leaders in different schools

Participants revealed that their school leaders are doing good work in the schools. They recommended the work their school leaders are doing in the institutions confirming change upon return from CPD confirming (Mashaya et. al., 2022; Bush, 2008). Some of the praises from the participating teachers are below.

Teacher 2 school 3 shared this:

He is a good leader. Aaaah, I strongly recommend him. I strongly recommend him, yeah. His leadership skills are just okay. You know the leader should try to motivate people, the leaders should be the one who tries to make things perfect, yeah. But still,

if if, its possible, if he can be the type of a leader, who, at least, on some things ah, delegate the decision making to other people not everything because you know when you are leading you can't. Some ideas should come from subordinates, yeah, but I strongly recommend him, because he is a guy of protocol aaaah, the guy is of protocol and discipline, many things are in order! Yeah, at least, good in an institution.

Teacher 1 school 4 said that:

Excellent, excellent, yeah. I like his leadership (laughing). But I have heard my friends even recommending him. As I have said maybe comparing since we have been having others but of course not 100 percent, some still speak some things but most of the times, what people speak is good about him, sure. At least we are trying, last year we sent 38 students to university, yes. So, we are seeing improvement, sure. And we are expecting to send many more this year.

Teacher 2 school 5 explained that:

The head teacher is a good person but it just surprise us as to why this area doesn't want to get other members involved too but him is a good person, very good person, is a good guy, a good guy can you do this, can you do this, can you do this, this issue can you handle it this way, this issue...and we always consult him and we are learning a lot from him but we are just surprised in this area to say what is it? What is stopping him maybe us from meeting, directing issues to say there is this, there is that, there is that sooo, aaaahm and that is the only area which is drawing him back members are talking about...it's only this area where they talk about more, here, what is happening? He is a good man, aaahm, we are actually enjoying, aaahm being with him and we hope to learn from him more as, as we go forward.

The verbatim quotes above reveal that the school leader plays a lot of roles. This means that he/she is a lot of things at the same time, in line with the experiences of school leaders in the work of Louis (1980), who indicated that school leaders have spoken about the diversity of responsibilities regarding their job; like being everything to a lot of people and having ten different jobs or as if you're many things. That is, diversity of school leaders' work points out different sorts of knowledge and expertise one is expected to master, so that at least you need to know a little bit of everything to execute such diverse work from facilities manager to nurse to counselor, and so on. Putting it in simple words, being a school leader is multi-tasking as at the same time you are a task manager, a businessperson, a counsellor, a doctor, a nurse, and you're all these different things.

While school leaders are performing well, the study revealed that other teachers report things that are not true to some school leaders. This destroys the health of the institution if the leader handles the issue unprofessionally. Although they have undergone the training, it is the hope of the organisers, the ministry, and all stakeholders that the leaders' leadership roles are improved. While teachers appreciate the good work leaders are doing in the schools, there are some issues which were reflected in two schools by 3 participating teachers of 3 key areas where leaders from 2 schools proved to be difficult to change in some areas after the training.

4.5. Chapter summary

The findings of this study agree with the findings of several studies that have the same findings. It can be concluded that, irrespective of the geographical area, the benefits of CPD programmes cannot be downgraded to the background and the participants know this. The current study has revealed a great deal of responses in which school leaders pointed to one thing that is crucial

in a leadership position. Being leaders, they were eager to learn and had expectations of what will be taught. They were looking forward to the knowledge and skills that their position demands them to possess in contemporary times, which were either lacking or limited in them. One of the experienced school leaders confessed that when he was invited to attend the training, he was happy because he knew that it would cover up the administration gaps that were existing in him at that time, and in fact, after he started attending this programme, he knew for sure that it was indeed addressing some of the gaps administratively that existed in him. The school leaders unanimously agreed that the CPD which they have undergone had a massive impact on them.

This means that CPDs are crucial as far as leadership position is concerned in secondary schools. This is evident in the behavior of school leaders who are regarded as drunkards while the training was in progress. They never missed classes, as one may assume. Although Continuing Professional Development systems vary in different countries, the need is the same.

The findings agree with what Mehmet (2020) indicated that throughout the past decades, policy makers and school reformers worldwide have embraced school leaders as a lever for school improvement, which is the reason why those who are in school leadership hunger for knowledge and skills acquisition because they know how complex their position is, demanding them to be multi-skilled. This is the reason why Devos et al. (2018) lamented that, ‘school leaders need to be supported and provided with appropriate continuous professional development opportunities to keep their skills up-to-date, to prevent drop out and job-related psychosocial issues and to support teachers’ professional development’, which is highly needed by the secondary school leaders in Malawi as well.

The implication is that whenever we see the best schools, behind them are school leaders who participate in CPDS, acquire knowledge and skills as a result, they are effective and considerate, who demonstrate leadership practices that are acceptable to the entire school community. The findings of the study revealed that school leaders require a number of skills through professional development. The skills that school leaders gained include managerial skills, development of school vision, passion in supporting teaching and learning, monitoring for effective teaching and learning, motivation of teachers, management of resources, and creation of an inclusive learning environment. The findings were consistent with findings from the existing literature, which also indicated the same skills that were gained by school leaders from the EQUALS school leadership programme.

Chapter Five: Summary of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Overview of the findings

The evidence on the professional development skills that school leaders need indicates a need for structured, regular and formal training, and induction processes to ensure that they are prepared to cope with the different aspects that shape school leadership and management.

Data from participating leaders revealed that in some cases, secondary school leaders are handpicked from the staffroom after assessment and recommendations by school leaders at the duty station to the authorities. They do not have formal training, so, in their early days, they depend on the trial-and-error method. This is very dangerous to the nation's education because bad practices in the trial-and-error method can impair the whole system.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that school leaders need continuous professional development. CPD is regarded as an indispensable part of school leaders in their position because they are equipped with skills and knowledge which aid them to handle their complex and diverse position.

It further revealed that the EQUALS School Leadership Programme is paramount, it has a massive impact on secondary school leaders. School leaders said that they have overwhelmingly profited from the training. Some of the new knowledge acquired from the training is management of material and human resources as well as data. Not only this, but they are also doing research at their duty station and finding solutions to the problems. Besides this, there was understanding policies and reforms that were vague to some school leaders. The

research revealed that the content of the modules is relevant to contemporary issues and easy to apply to real-life situations.

5. 1 Conclusion

The study on investigating the impact of CPD on secondary school leaders has revealed that CPD is beneficial for the school leaders, teachers and students. Although this study covered only one educational division, it has established the position of CPDs in Malawi. The confirmation on the professional development needs of school leaders shows a need for continued structured, consistence, and formal trainings to ensure that school leaders are prepared to manage situations that affect school improvement. Adult Education theory suggests that adults are well matured, educated learners who can direct their learning therefore, besides the formal and structured CPDs by the government, adults need to be proactive in personal accumulation of skills and knowledge.

Apart from formal experiences, such as attending workshops, seminars, mentoring, professional meetings, conferences, peer observations, discussions with colleagues and formal courses, school leaders as adults must be guided by Andragogy in making decisions. This should enhance the motivation to learn on their own. This can be achieved when school leaders engage in personal professional growth through reading professional publications and watching television documentaries, video conferencing related to school leadership and management. This can only work when school leaders are equipped with technological skills formally and informally in line with Technology Acceptance Model where individuals must accept the use of technology due to the technological issues emerging in the world positively affecting school leader CPD implementation. As professional development is learning on the job, intending to grow and enhance school leadership and teaching practice, which should lead to improved

performance for learners in the school, this study concludes that school leadership is key to school effectiveness, as such, school leaders require regular and continuous professional development in all matters of school leadership.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Educational implications

The findings indicated that the EQUALS School Leadership Programme in Malawi has greatly impacted school leaders' professional growth. This is because the key perspectives in the professional development curricula demonstrated increasing attention to the needs of participants, whereby their needs were considered through the Ministry of Education in planning the CPD programme. This is expected to improve the impact and the sustainability of professional development.

Therefore, as it has proved to have great impact on school leaders, it is indispensable for the position of secondary school leaders in these contemporary times. Therefore, falling into the 'trap' of unsustainability because of negligence or personality issues, will mean loss to the nation. EQUALS School Leadership Programme needs to be sustained and established because the quality of the country's schools depends on the quality of the country's school leaders, who are drivers of educational activities every day of their career life. So, most importantly, secondary school leaders should be given more training to continually build their skills in management and leadership to enable them to analyse their environment and lead schools in a positive direction for quality improvement because one training is not enough.

Furthermore, secondary school leaders need access to serious and sustained learning opportunities at every stage in their career to manage schools in ways that meet demanding

responsibilities and the most recent standards for quality teaching and learning, hence school improvement.

5.2.2 Contribution to knowledge

The study has revealed the attitude of school leaders towards content professional development. They have recommended it and proposed that if they can be called to participate in the training again, they can go. Additionally, they have recommended the use of digital technology, which they have learned a lot and improved their professional skills.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. To the Ministry of Education

Since school leaders have presented their experiences, views, opinions and suggestions on the impact of the EQUALS School Leadership Programme, the researcher recommends the following:

- The officials should take the recommendations seriously and address what appears to be the gaps.
- The findings should at least help the country, so that those to whom they are addressed should be meaningful, practical and realistic.

5.3.2. To the organisers of CPDs

The researcher recommends that:

- The programme should be long term, continuous and sustained due to the huge impact on school improvement through the school leaders, as they have been equipped with the necessary skills for school improvement.
- In case of future programmes, feedback and certification should be done in time.
- Use of technology should be sustained in future school leaders' CPD.
- The school leadership programme has a huge impact on school improvement through the school leaders, and yet one can hardly see it in the reports as one of the components of the entire project; as such, the researcher recommends that it should have a place in the project.
- For future programmes should create an environment of inclusiveness. The researcher suggests that the modules should either be put in braille, or they should be recorded so that the visually impaired may have the audio information.
- This research study was limited to a single education division in Malawi, and the findings could not be generalised to other education divisions in the wider population. Building on the limitations, we recommend further research on professional development of school leaders by the EQUALS School Leadership Programme in multiple education divisions, thus enabling future researchers to explore a more comparative approach.

5.3.3. To the school leaders

- Experts who prepare the training content know what is needed by the school leaders, and as such, they prepare relevant materials for the school leaders in pursuit of school

improvement. In this regard, after the training, the experts and education officials expect that the knowledge will be applied in real-life situations in schools to promote school improvement. There is no need to resist change, negligence, or issues related to personality. What is resisted can destroy the whole school community, and attitudes cannot build an institution. Therefore, leaders need to embrace the knowledge and create room to change by applying the knowledge and skills acquired to real-life situations.

- Leaders who are close to retirement dates should embrace the training because when some retire, they might join the private sector and that knowledge will still benefit Malawian schools.

5.4. Chapter Summary

This study aimed to investigate the impact of continuous professional development of secondary school leaders on school improvement. Results from the study provide clear evidence that CPD of secondary school leaders has a massive impact on school leaders, positively affecting their leadership practices, resulting in school improvement. Participating teachers confirm the impact of CPD through their experiences under the leaders who underwent the EQUALS School Leadership Programme. In all six schools that data was collected, the participating teachers unanimously pointed to their daily motivation by the school leaders. The school leaders are handling the schools in a way that teachers are motivated in many areas. This means that the knowledge that the school leaders were equipped with from the EQUALS training is being used creating conducive environment for the entire school community.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent forms for participants



Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC)

Informed Consent Form for Research in Master of Education in Leadership and Management

Introduction

I am **Maggie RK Chisi** from **Mzuzu University**. We are doing research on **investigating the impact of continuing professional development of secondary school leaders: A case of EQUALS School Leadership Programme**. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me or of another researcher.

Purpose of the research

This research aims to investigate the impact of professional development on secondary school leaders by interrogating if the training is addressing needs of school leaders.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in a group discussion and/or individual interview.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are the right participant to provide me with the right and correct information as per research topic.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate nothing will change. You may skip any question and move on to the next question.

Duration

The research takes place for a period from July to August 2024.

Risks

You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview/survey if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

Sharing the Results

The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you and your community before it is made widely available to the public. Following, we will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact:

J. Chatambalala, PhD

Senior Lecturer in Leadership and Management

Mzuzu University

Department of Education Foundation

P/Bag 201

Luwinga

Mzuzu 2

Malawi

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) which is a committee whose task is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the Committee, contact Mr. Gift Mbwele, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) Administrator, Mzuzu University, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2, Phone: 0999404008/0888641486

Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent

*I have been invited to participate in research about **investigating the impact of continuing professional development of secondary school leaders: A case of EQUALS School Leadership Programme.***

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

If illiterate 1

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

1 A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team). Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.



Print name of witness _____

Thumb print of participant

Signature of witness _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the research project. I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Appendix B: Interview guide for secondary school leaders Section A: Questions on professional development

1. Is EQUALS school leadership training programme compulsory for all school managers in Malawi? If yes, what is/were the reaction of school leaders?
2. What does the Equity with Quality of Learning in Secondary (EQUALS) Leadership Programme emphasize?
3. Is the content of the modules beneficial to leadership roles that you can apply the knowledge to solve contextual and real-life issues?
 - a. Example of contextual issues: special needs, developmental level, culture, interests, gender etc.
 - b. Example of real-life issues: bullying, exhaustion, relationships with peers, test anxiety, indiscipline cases like beer drinking, disobedient to teachers, prefects and school administration, watching pornography etc.
4. What worked well in the entire project or what interventions would you recommend be sustained and/or scaled up? Please provide a justification for your response.
5. What strategies or interventions should be discontinued in future efforts such as these? Why?
6. What were some barriers, if any, that you encountered in the entire training period? How did you overcome the barrier(s)?
7. To what extent did the organizers advance or hinder project implementation? Please explain.
8. What recommendations do you have for future efforts such as these or what would the organizers do differently next time? Please explain.

Section B: Questions on use of technology by school leaders

1. I understand you were using Moodle platform in this training. May you share your very first experience of using digital technology for learning? Was it stressful? How?
2. In your opinion what are the benefits of using digital technology in CPD training?
3. What are the challenges that you faced when using digital technology in the training?
4. What are the professional development opportunities available for leaders related to digital technology use?
5. Did the use of technology bring any positive change in your leadership capabilities and styles? If yes, how?
6. Would you recommend the same system for CPDs for school leaders in the future?

Appendix C: Interview guide for and teachers

1. Is your school leader willing to share his skills with you as a future leader?
2. What do most teachers round here think of the way that the school leader handles (leadership practices) the institution? Is that the way you feel too?
3. What type of behaviour do you see in your school leader?

For example:

- a. Does your school leader have relaxed attitude of not showing up when the attention is highly needed?
- b. Does your school leader relate with teachers and parents in procurement and management of educational resources to achieve the school stated aims and objectives?
 - c. Are you free to look up to your school leader for instructional guidance?
4. Is your school leader able to create a climate of encouragement and expectation in which you do learn how to improve professionally?
5. What are your perceptions of the school leader's leadership roles on instructional supervision in the school?
6. Are you happy with the way your school leader communicates with the members of staff and students? ie policy, school code of conduct, circulars etc.
7. Can you talk about how your school leader handles communication having in mind that students experience fundamental changes during adolescence and that these changes have a profound effect on their behaviour?
8. How does your school leader handle decisional power? ie Does he delegate to decide on his behalf through committees?
 - a. Do you refer to him some cases?
 - b. Does he consider getting the students background information when discipling them?

9. Does your school leader have influence on you to achieve common objectives for the school?
10. Does school-based supervision take place at your school? If yes, at what interval? In your opinion, do you think that is enough or more should be done?
11. What are the main challenges that you face as a HOD/teacher under your school leader's leadership practices and roles?
12. Do you feel motivated in the day-to-day practices of your school leader? Can you tell me more?
13. What motivates you as a HOD/ teacher in daily duties at your duty station?
14. Considering your experience, how likely would you recommend your school leader's performance to the authorities after the training?

Appendix D: Research interview guide for the Principal Quality Assurance Officer

1. What challenges do school leaders encounter as soon as they get to the position of leadership?
2. What are the leadership practices of CPDs of school leaders that sustain school improvement?
3. How do CPDs contribute to school leaders' job performance?
4. How is the performance of school leaders now after the EQUALS school leadership programme?
- 6a. Is there any resistance to change after the knowledge acquired from EQUALS school leadership programme by school leaders?
 - b. How do you curb that type of behaviour?
7. Does the use of Moodle Platform suit well with school leaders without network?
8. Were there any challenges for school leaders on the use of the Moodle Platform?
9. Is there any positive impact that this type of method or digital technology has on school leaders?
10. What is the positive impact that digital technology has on school leaders?

Appendix E: Interview guide for organisers

1. Why did you venture in this programme?
2. Were the beneficiaries of the programme reached as intended?
3. How will you know the progress of school leaders since they finished some two years ago?
4. What is the plan of the group of other school leaders that were left during that time?
5. Attitude of school leaders upon the introduction of the Moodle Platform?
6. How were those challenges met by school leaders affect the entire programme?

Appendix F: Letter of Introduction



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

**Department of Teaching, Learning and
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27th May 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MS MAGGIE CHISI

Ms Maggie Chisi is a registered Master of Education (Leadership and Management) Program student at Mzuzu University. She has been cleared by the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to collect data for the research study she is conducting as a requirement for the program.

Kindly assist her accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo
Program Coordinator

Appendix G: Support Letter to the Study Site

Telephone: +265 1 312 144
+265 1 312 107
Fax: +265 1 312 640



Communications should be addressed to
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (NORTH)
P.O. BOX 133
Mzuzu

Ref. No: NED/2/1A

31st May, 2024

To: THE CONCERNED HEADTEACHERS - NED

Dear Sir,

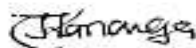
INTRODUCING – MAGGIE RK CHISI

I would like to introduce **Maggie RK Chisi** a registered Master of Education (Leadership and Management) Programme Student at Mzuzu University

She would like to request your good offices to accord her the opportunity of collecting data to be used for academic purposes under the topic of; **" Investigating the impact of continuing Professional Development of Secondary School Leaders: A Case of Equals School Leadership Programme."**

Looking at her study area, the office reserves no objection to her request as the topic captioned herein resonates well with the Ministry of Education goal of promoting education in the country.

Your support towards this exercise will be immensely appreciated.



Juliana Kamanga
For/THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER – (N)

