

**ASSESSING THE ROLES OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION:
A CASE OF NJELENGWA ZONE IN CHITIPA DISTRICT**

BY

CLEMENT NYIRENDA

(MEDLM 20/21)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Education in Leadership and Management

at

Mzuzu University

May, 2024

DECLARATION

I, Clement Nyirenda, declare that this thesis entitled Assessing the role of School Management Committees in Improving the Quality of Primary Education: A Case of Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis remains my original effort. Any information read from other people's work has been acknowledged through appropriate citations and references.

Name of student: Clement Mwiza Nyirenda

Signature: _____

Date:

Name of supervisor: Prof. V. Mgonezulu

Signature: _____

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe an immense debt to several exceptional individuals for their support, love, and encouragement during this academic journey. However, I can only acknowledge a few distinct individuals who have contributed significantly to the completion of this thesis.

My utmost gratitude goes to my supervisor, **Professor Victor Mgomezulu**, for their guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this research journey. I could not have asked for a better supervisor.

Strong bonds of friendship and family stretched powerfully over the textile of this work, supporting and enabling my efforts. I acknowledge each one's immense contribution. Thank you, my wife, **Miriam**, for the love and support during this journey, thank you so much. My constant companion and biggest source of joy, my four-year-old son, **Linga**, while writing this thesis, your presence has been a constant reminder of the importance of hard work and dedication. I hope that one day, you will read this and be proud of the sacrifices we made together. Keep exploring, learning, and growing – the world needs more curious and brilliant minds like yours!

Finally, I am grateful to all the respondents in the case study schools who participated in this study. Without their invaluable contributions, this project would never have been successful.

DEDICATION

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the lasting impact of my father, **Paul Jacobs Nyirenda**, who may no longer be with us but whose legacy lives on through the values he instilled in me. His unwavering belief in the power of education and his encouragement to pursue my academic dreams have been a constant source of motivation throughout my journey. Though he is no longer here to see the culmination of my efforts, I hope he knows that his love, support, and guidance have made this achievement possible. I dedicate this thesis to his memory and strive to make him proud. Thank you, Dad, for instilling in me a love of learning that will continue to guide me through my life.

ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT

This study sets out to assess the roles of the School Management Committees in improving the quality of primary education within the Njেলengwa Zone in Chitipa District in Malawi. Despite their importance in managing primary schools, SMCs seemed to struggle to effectively execute their roles. Specifically, the study sought to assess the knowledge of SMCs on their roles in ensuring quality primary education, analyse the effectiveness of the SMCs in carrying out their roles, and lastly, examine the challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles. The study employed a cross-sectional design and a qualitative approach and was guided by the Open Systems Theory as its theoretical framework. This involved a desk review and field data collection through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions, including twenty-one SMC members, three head teachers, nine teachers and one Primary Education Advisor. The data was then subjected to inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that most SMC members were aware of traditional roles but unaware of new roles, leading to partial and ineffective implementation. Challenges included limited access to updated information such as the 2022 Guidelines for the formation and functioning of SMCs in Primary schools, which have not been widely distributed or translated into local languages and resources, as well as a lack of comprehensive training. The study highlights the urgent need for comprehensive training programs for SMC members and better dissemination of educational policies to strengthen their capacity, which could lead to improved school governance and enhanced educational outcomes.

KEYWORDS

School Management Committee, Primary Education Quality, Education Stakeholders, Community Participation,

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CBE: Complementary Basic Education
CBO: Community-Based Organization
DANIDA: Danish International Development Agency
DEO: District Education Office
DFiD: Department for International Development
DRD: Disaster Risk Management
ECD: Early Childhood Development
FGD: Focus Group Discussion
GBV: Gender-Based Violence
GoM: Government of Malawi
KII: Key Informant Interview
MoE: Ministry of Education
MoEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NNP: National Numeracy Program
NRP: National Reading Program
OAU: Organisation of African Unity
PEA: Primary Education Adviser
PTAs: Parents Teacher Associations
SBM: School-based management
SIG: School Improvement Grant
SIP School Improvement Plans
SMC: School Management Committees
SMDC: School Management Development Committees
UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN: United Nations
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DEDICATION	1
ABSTRACT	2
ABSTRACT	2
GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
LIST OF FIGURES	8
LIST OF TABLES	9
CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY	10
1.1 Chapter Overview	10
1.2 Background to the Study	10
<i>1.2.1 Historical Character of Community Participation in Malawi</i>	11
<i>1.2.2 Decentralisation and other Policy Initiatives for Enhancing Community Participation</i>	12
<i>1.2.3 Guidelines for School Management Committees and Study Focus</i>	13
1.3 Statement of the Problem	15
1.4 Purpose of Study	16
1.5 Study Objectives	17
<i>1.5.1 Aim of the Study</i>	17
<i>1.5.2 Specific Objectives</i>	17
<i>1.5.3 Research Questions</i>	17
1.6 Significance of Study	17
1.7 Theoretical Framework	18
1.8 Conceptual Framework	19
1.9 Definitions of Operational Terms	20
<i>1.10.1 Community Participation</i>	20
<i>1.10.2 Primary Education Quality</i>	21
<i>1.10.3 Education Stakeholders</i>	21
<i>1.10.4 School Management Committee</i>	21
1.10 Chapter Summary	21

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	23
2.1 Chapter Overview	23
2.2 Quality Education	23
2.3 Community participation in education	25
2.4 Rationale for Community Participation in School Management	26
2.5 Level of knowledge of SMC members on their roles in ensuring quality primary education	27
2.6 Effectiveness of School Management Committees in Improving Educational Quality	30
2.7 Challenges that SMCs Face in Carrying out Their Roles and Responsibilities	33
<i>2.7.1 Power and Influence</i>	33
<i>2.7.2 Capacity Constraints</i>	35
<i>2.7.3 Limited Sources of Information</i>	36
2.8 Literature Gap	37
2.9 Chapter Summary	38
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	39
3.1 Chapter Overview	39
3.2 Research Paradigm	39
3.3 Research Approach	40
3.4 Research Site	41
3.5 Research Design	41
3.6 Sampling	41
<i>3.6.1 Study Population</i>	42
<i>3.6.2 Sampling Techniques</i>	42
<i>3.6.3 Sample Size</i>	43
3.7 Data Collection Instruments	44
<i>3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) Guide</i>	44
<i>3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide</i>	45
<i>3.7.3 Document Review Log</i>	46
3.8 Quality Assurance of the Data Collection Instruments	47
<i>3.8.1 Pilot Testing of Instruments.</i>	48
3.9 Data Analysis	48
3.10 Trustworthiness	50
<i>3.10.1 Credibility</i>	50
<i>3.10.2 Confirmability</i>	51

3.10.3	<i>Transferability</i>	52
3.11	Ethical Considerations	52
3.12	Chapter Summary	53
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS		54
4.1	Chapter Overview	54
4.2	Knowledge of SMCs on their Roles in Ensuring Quality Primary Education	54
4.2.1	<i>Promotion of Adherence to Financial and Procurement Procedures</i>	54
4.2.2	<i>Promotion of Overall School Performance</i>	56
4.2.3	<i>Promotion of Advocacy</i>	57
4.2.4	<i>Promotion of a Conducive Environment for Effective Curriculum Implementation</i>	58
4.2.5	<i>Support to School Programs</i>	58
4.2.6	<i>Promotion of Child Protection, Health and Safety of Learners and Teachers</i>	60
4.2.7	<i>Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs</i>	60
4.2.8	<i>Promotion of a Resilient School Environment</i>	61
4.2.9	<i>Sustainability of Programs and Interventions</i>	62
4.2.10	<i>Discussion of the findings</i>	63
4.3	Effectiveness of the SMCs in Carrying Out Their Roles	64
4.3.1	<i>Promotion of Adherence to Financial and Procurement Procedures</i>	65
4.3.2	<i>Promotion of Overall School Performance</i>	67
4.3.3	<i>Promotion of Advocacy</i>	70
4.3.4	<i>Creation of a Conducive Environment for Effective Curriculum Implementation at the School Level</i>	71
4.3.5	<i>Support to School Programs</i>	73
4.3.6	<i>Promotion of Child Protection, Health and Safety of Learners and Teachers</i>	74
4.3.7	<i>Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs</i>	75
4.3.8	<i>Promotion of a Resilient School Environment</i>	76
4.3.9	<i>Sustainability of Programmes and Interventions</i>	76
4.3.10	<i>Discussion of the findings</i>	77
4.4	Challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles	78
4.4.1	<i>Lack of Training</i>	78
4.4.2	<i>Limited Sources of Information</i>	81
4.4.3	<i>Power and Influence</i>	82
4.4.4	<i>Lack of Administrative Skills</i>	83
4.4.5	<i>Discussion of the Findings</i>	84

4.5 Chapter Summary	85
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	86
5.1 Chapter Overview	86
5.2 Summary of Findings	86
5.2.1 Knowledge of SMCs on their Roles in Ensuring Quality Primary Education	86
5.2.2 Effectiveness of the SMCs in Carrying out their Roles	87
5.2.3 Challenges that the SMCs face in Carrying out their roles	89
5.3 Recommendations	89
<i>5.3.1 To the Ministry of Education</i>	89
<i>5.3.2 To School Management</i>	90
<i>5.3.3 To the SMCs</i>	90
5.4 Contribution of the Study to Knowledge	92
5.3 Suggestions for Future Research	92
5.6 Closing Remarks	92
References	94
APPENDICES	102
Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for PEA, Headteachers and Teachers	102
Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview guide for the SMC Chair	103
Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Protocol (with the SMC)	104
Appendix 4: Document Review Log	106
Appendix 5: Consent Form	107
Appendix 6: Letter of Introduction	110
Appendix 7: Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee Letter of Approval	111

LIST OF FIGURES

	page
<i>Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study</i>	9

LIST OF TABLES

	page
<i>Table 3:1 Summary of Participants per School.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Table 3:2 Document Review Log.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Table 3:3 Data Category and Themes.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Table 5:1 Summary of the Results of the Research.....</i>	<i>82</i>

CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter covers the study's background, statement of the problem, significance and purpose of the study, specific objectives, and research questions.

1.2 Background to the Study

Education, though a social activity, has significant economic implications. The economic growth of a country, to a large extent, depends on the growth of its educational system, which, according to Kumar (2015), in turn, depends on the degree of community participation. As Andoh-Robertson, Effah, Eshun, and Kwasi (2020) put it, the importance of education has never been doubted or contradicted in any part of the world because it provides the tool for imparting knowledge and skills, cultivates values, morals, and character; and develops the intellect. While strategies and methods required in imparting knowledge are varied, one such strategy is the coordinated effort provided through the partnership activities of the community through governing bodies such as the School Management Committees (SMCs). The activities of SMCs are critical at the primary school level, where teachers and school management have to cope with young children and adolescents developing their intellect and personality (Andoh-Robertson et al., 2020).

Education is universally recognised as a fundamental human right essential for realising other rights and for the overall development and well-being of individuals and societies. This recognition is underscored by its inclusion in numerous human rights treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 (UN, 1948); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights UN, (1966); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN, 1979); the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights (OAU, 1981); but also the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990). Moreover, the global commitment to education is evident in the establishment of international goals, strategies, and targets aimed at promoting education as a means of achieving broader societal objectives such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable development.

Further to the above, in recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in development approaches, with increasing emphasis on community participation as a fundamental driver of progress, particularly in the field of education. As such, community participation in primary education, mainly through structures like School Management Committees (SMCs), has garnered increasing attention as a vital component of development initiatives. This shift reflects a departure from traditional top-down approaches towards more inclusive models that prioritise the active involvement of communities in decision-making processes. The bottom-up approach is designed to call for the active participation of grassroots institutions in the operational structure (Bag, Das & Dansana, 2020).

The significance of community participation in primary education lies in its potential to ensure that educational initiatives are contextually relevant, responsive to local needs, and sustainable in the long term. Through active engagement, community members become stakeholders in the educational process, contributing to decision-making, resource mobilisation, and the overall improvement of academic outcomes. Moreover, community participation fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to more significant commitment and investment in educational initiatives. In the context of the Malawian education system, various mechanisms have been established to facilitate community participation, with SMCs playing a central role.

1.2.1 Historical Character of Community Participation in Malawi

Sehrawat and Roy (2021) observed that school is a part of society, and parents and other stakeholders play an essential role in school functioning. In this regard, their participation is critical. Along the same lines, the issue of community participation in education in Malawi as part of policy and practice is not new. It predates the country's independence, which she attained in 1964. From independence in 1964 until 2013, Malawi has been using the Education Act, enacted in 1962 before independence. According to the Education Act (1962), every school should have a School Management Committee (SMC) composed of community members. The School Management Committees' function should be to meet regularly to address school issues such as infrastructure, teacher performance, teacher discipline, quality of teaching, absenteeism, and so forth, as they affect the day-to-day running of the school (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004).

The promotion of quality primary education requires a combined effort from all stakeholders. The role of local communities can therefore not be over-emphasized. Local communities form

the essential element that brings together government and development partners to ensure high-quality education. Despite efforts made by Malawi to encourage parental involvement through SMCs in primary schools, there are growing debates about their effectiveness in playing their roles. School Management Committees and PTAs often do not exist, or if they do, they are largely dormant. Marphantia, Edge, Legault and Archer (2010) in Improving Learners Outcome in Primary Schools Project (ILOPS) in Burundi suggest that the involvement of parents is mostly limited to attending meetings initiated by school staff. Discussions with teachers, if they occur, are limited to enrolment or examination times. Parents do not actively influence school management nor do they work with community leaders to hold schools accountable for improving the quality of learning. They continue to observe that most parents have limited knowledge of their children's learning requirements, other than the obvious need for basic supplies of books, pens and uniforms. There is also very little monitoring of children's performance or dialogue around teaching and learning strategies. They observed that one key reason for this is the lack of training of School Management Committees. They believed that this is compounded by the poor relations that exist in many situations between staff and communities. They concluded that communities often lack confidence to deal with better-educated teachers, while at the same time, teachers often fear and resent School Management Committees as they see them as a mechanism to rob them of power and control over them.

In 1994, Malawi changed from a one-party dictatorship to a multiparty democracy. This change in the political system ushered in changes in how communities were viewed in the development administration setup. Furthermore, Malawi introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994. Through the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994, the Government has, on the one hand, catalysed an increase in access to primary education for Malawian children. As a result, there was a need for adequate and effective mechanisms to sustain the increased enrolment. Therefore, there was an urgent need for more effort to enhance the quality of education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004). Thus, the government recognised that promoting the quality of primary education required a combined effort from all stakeholders, particularly SMCs. Hence, the role of SMCs, a key stakeholder, could therefore not be overemphasised.

1.2.2 Decentralisation and other Policy Initiatives for Enhancing Community Participation

In 1998, Malawi adopted a decentralisation policy whose objective was to create a democratic environment and institutions for governance and development at the local level, which would

facilitate the participation of the grassroots in decision-making (Government of Malawi, 1998). As noted by the Ministry of Education in the Malawi Education Sector Investment Plan (Ministry of Education, 2019), typically, decentralisation is accompanied by an emphasis on community involvement and participation in school management. Thus, it emphasises public participation and acknowledges the agency of community members in any development enterprise, including education.

As part of its efforts to improve community participation, in line with the spirit of participatory democracy and principles of decentralisation, in 2004, with support from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology developed the National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004). The overall objective of this strategy was to provide an enabling environment and coordinated support mechanisms that will ensure meaningful sustainable participation of communities in the management of primary schools throughout Malawi (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004). This strategy stipulated the expanded roles of School Management Committees. Furthermore, the Malawi National Education Sector Plan prioritises mobilising communities to participate in 'whole-school development' as a critical strategy to improve primary education governance, management and quality (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2008).

In 2013, Malawi enacted the Education Act to replace the 1962 Education Act. Section 21, subsection 1 of the Education Act of 2013 mandates each local government authority to establish a School Management Committee with respect to a government primary school or assisted primary school. Furthermore, Section 23 of the same act outlines the functions of such a school management committee. Following this, the Ministry of Education published "Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools" (Ministry of Education, 2022), whose objective is to improve primary education's internal efficiency by improving governance and management of primary schools.

1.2.3 Guidelines for School Management Committees and Study Focus

The recently published "Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools" (Ministry of Education, 2022), were developed because SMCs had been operating without clear guidelines. In view of which the Ministry of Education

developed them to provide guidance on their roles for efficient and effective discharging of their duties (Ministry of Education, 2022). However, there is also the expectation that diligent implementation of these guidelines will ensure that local communities are more involved in their children's education and contribute to improved quality education in their schools (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The guidelines are supposed to assist in attaining improvements in the three Strategic Priorities of the National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP) (Ministry of Education, 2019) of Access and Equity, Quality and Relevance and Governance and Management. They are supposed to assist implementers, particularly at the district, zone and school levels to manage schools with proper guidance and act as a point of reference during implementation. They have been prepared to be used by SMCs in discharging their duties and when sensitizing other stakeholders about the composition and roles of the committee. As such the guidelines have comprehensively covered areas such as composition, tenure, election, qualities as well as the roles of the SMC. They also tackle issues of governance such as transparency and accountability. In addition, they also deal with one of the main requirements of the SMCs which is coordination and collaboration so that the committees do not work in isolation.

Furthermore, the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) are more comprehensive as they include new roles and responsibilities that have not traditionally been the domain of SMCs. The old roles and responsibilities generally only involved helping with construction and fundraising, and not in whole school management. Some of the traditional roles were, checking, inspecting, and maintaining school buildings and equipment, initiating development projects at the school with the help of other community members and overseeing the development of the School Action Plan. The new roles and responsibilities included in the new guidelines include promotion of adherence to financial and procurement procedures, promotion of overall school performance, support to school programs, supporting learners with diverse needs, and promotion of child protection, health and safety of learners and teachers

Note should be taken that even though the Government produces these documents there is a need to learn whether they are widely available and if the SMCs are aware of them because lack of knowledge may lead to poor quality of primary education. The lack of awareness of their roles could be caused by various reasons. It is against this backdrop, and in light of the new guidelines, that this study seeks to assess the roles of the School Management Committees

(SMCs) in improving the quality of primary education, with a specific focus on Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District, Malawi. By investigating the SMCs' knowledge of roles, their effectiveness, and the challenges they face by SMCs in this context, the study aims to provide insights into the mechanisms through which community participation can be improved to enhance the quality of primary education.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

While governments play a crucial role in formulating and implementing education policies and programs, community members usually represented by SMCs are critical agents of change. Their active involvement in decision-making processes, resource mobilisation, and implementation of education initiatives is essential for addressing local needs and ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of education interventions (UNDP, 2024; UNESCO, 2020; National Planning Commission, 2020; UNICEF, 2019; World Bank, 2018). The effectiveness of SMCs in improving the quality of education is intrinsically tied to the understanding and awareness of their functions, mandates, and responsibilities, which can be resolved if there is training. Insufficient knowledge and awareness can impede the ability of SMC members to make informed decisions, set educational priorities, and engage constructively in school governance. This knowledge gap may lead to underutilising the committee's potential and hinder educational progress (UNESCO, 2005).

Even though in Malawi there is a long history of community participation in education, with the 1962 Education Act stipulating that every school should have a School Management Committee (SMC) composed of community members, in reality, School Management Committees were largely dormant (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004). In addition, where School Management Committees existed, their roles and impact have been minimal. There has been limited participation from SMCs in other more contentious school management issues, such as monitoring teachers' performance (GoM, 2004). Marphantia, Edge, Legault and Archer (2010) in Improving Learners Outcome in Primary Schools Project (ILOPS) data from Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda suggest that most parents interact with schools in an inconsistent and unpredictable manner. They observed that one key reason was the lack of training for School Management Committees. They concluded that SMCs often lack the confidence to deal with better-educated teachers because they are unaware of their roles because of a lack of training. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive training

and support for School Management Committees to empower them to play a more active and effective role in education.

The Government of Malawi through the Ministry of Education developed the National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004), the Education Act of 2013, and Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) to promote the participation of communities in primary schools' quality improvement through the SMCs. The effectiveness of SMCs in improving the quality of education is intrinsically tied to the understanding and awareness of their functions, mandates, and responsibilities. Insufficient knowledge and awareness can impede the ability of SMC members to make informed decisions, set educational priorities, and engage constructively in school governance. Marphantia et al., (2010) attributes these challenges to lack of or poor training that the SMCs receive. This knowledge gap may lead to the underutilization of the committee's potential and, consequently, hinder educational progress (UNESCO, 2005). The lack of awareness of SMCs and their roles extends beyond committee members to encompass teachers, parents, students, and local community members. In many instances, these stakeholders do not fully comprehend the significance of SMCs in school governance or the ways in which they can contribute to enhancing the quality of education. As a result, opportunities for meaningful collaboration and stakeholder engagement are missed, which can have a cascading effect on the educational ecosystem (Giddens, 2016). This study therefore, seeks to assess the roles, School Management Committees in Njelengwa Zone play in the schools that in turn may contribute to improving the quality of education in the Zone.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The study aims to assess the roles of School Management Committees (SMCs) in improving the quality of education, specifically within the context of the Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District, which is in Northern Malawi. This is based on the fact that having the community effectively and efficiently discharge their duties by playing their roles as they were meant to in the school's management can lead to improved students' academic performance because when some roles are neglected, all roles of the vested efforts of creating a conducive environment for enhanced education outcomes will not be achieved.

The study aims to assess the role played by SMCs in improving quality education within Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District.

1.5 Study Objectives

1.5.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to assess the role played by SMCs in improving quality education.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Evaluate the knowledge of SMCs of their roles in ensuring quality primary education;
2. Analyse the effectiveness of the SMCs in carrying out their roles in Primary Schools in Njelengwa Zone;
3. Examine the challenges the SMCs face in carrying out their roles in Primary Schools in Njelengwa Zone.

1.5.3 Research Questions

To meet the objectives, the study will answer the following research question.

- How do SMC members view their roles in ensuring quality education in primary schools in Njelengwa Zone?
- How effective are the SMCs in carrying out their roles in Primary Schools in Njelengwa Zone?
- What challenges do the SMCs face in carrying out their roles in Primary Schools in Njelengwa Zone?

1.6 Significance of Study

This study is significant because investigating the knowledge of roles, effectiveness, and challenges faced by SMCs in this particular context will provide insights into the mechanisms through which community participation can be improved to enhance educational outcomes. As for the SMCs, this study has the potential to enable them to improve their performance in their roles and responsibilities in schools. The research is also of great value to the school administrators and other stakeholders who may use it to determine how best to engage with the School Management Committee for better outcomes. Furthermore, it will contribute to the

scholarship on school-based management, community participation, and school management committees. Based on the insights it will unearth, this information will be helpful to other researchers.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be used to guide the study is the Open Systems Theory. This theory is based on the view that organisations are strongly influenced by their environment. It was championed by Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn, who emphasised that the external environment determines the organisation's survival (Kahn & Katz, 1952). This theory views organisations as entities that take inputs from the external environment, transform them, and release them as outputs in line with reciprocal effects on the organisation and the environment in which it operates. In other words, the organisation becomes part and parcel of the environment in which it is situated.

This theory identifies organisational behaviour by mapping the repeated cycles of input, throughput, output, and feedback between an organisation and its external environment. Systems receive input from the environment either as information or as resources. The systems then process the input internally, called throughput, and release outputs into the environment to restore equilibrium to the environment. The system then seeks feedback to determine if the output was effective in restoring equilibrium. As can be seen, the systems approach focuses on the means to maintain organisational survival. It emphasises long-term goals rather than the short-term goals of the goal-attainment approach (Thien & Razak, 2012).

The unique role of School Management Committees can be observed from the external environment. These committees, formed by non-staff parents who have little involvement in the school's internal affairs, play a crucial part in the transformational process of the school's administration, aiming to achieve the school's goals.

In social systems, outputs are the attainment of the school's goals and are represented by the system's products, results, outcomes, or accomplishments. Although the kinds of outputs will vary with a specific school, they usually include one or more of the following: student and teacher growth, pass rates, student dropout rates, employee performance and turnover, school-community relations, and job satisfaction.

The four elements of theory must be distinct from the role of School Management Committees in improving the quality of primary education in Malawi. School Management Committees form an integral part of the school system that brings input, helps in the transformational process (administrative tasks), leads to the attainment of school goals (output), and provides feedback for corrections and improvement.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

A comprehensive conceptual framework is needed to understand the contribution of School Management Committees in enhancing the quality of education in the Njelengwa Zone. According to Cohen and Manion (2014), a conceptual framework should assist the researcher in carrying out research in an organised manner. It guides the researcher in understanding how one variable affects the other.

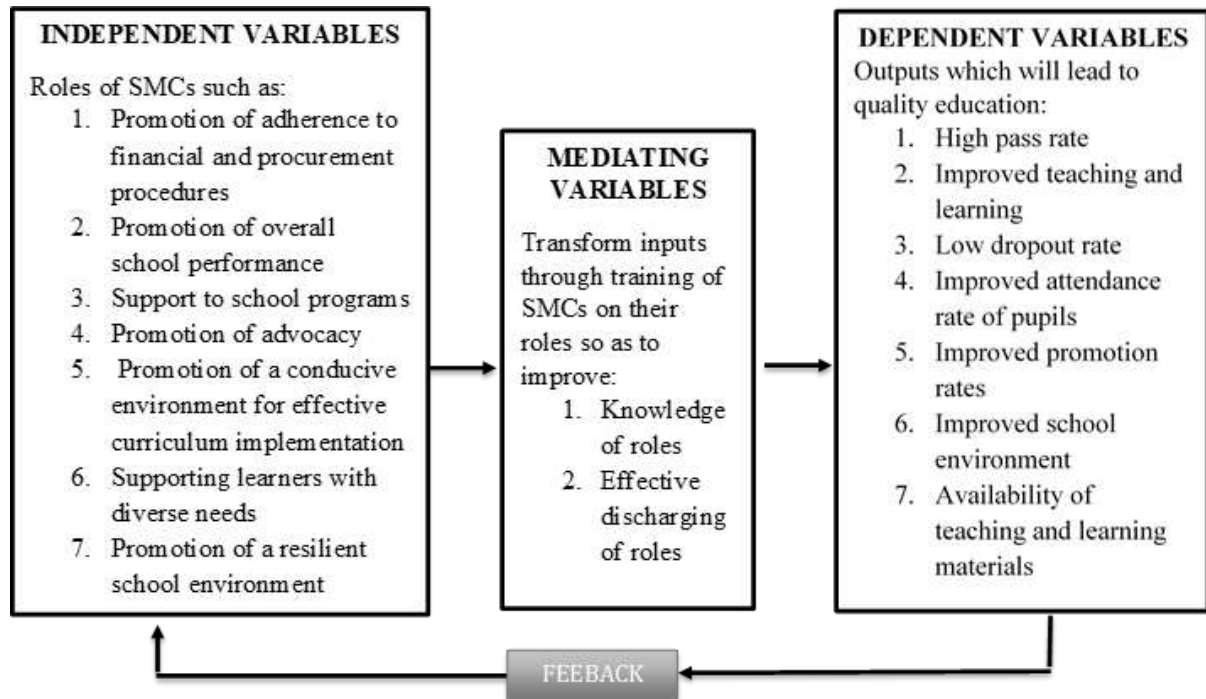
This study adopted a conceptual framework modified from the Open Systems Theory. The justification for using this framework came from the variables developed in the theory as well as the variables advocated in most literature as the functions and roles of SMCs. The model comprises the essential components on which data collection and analysis were based to guide this study.

The components are inputs, processes, and outputs. The assumption is that if both the inputs and the process are of high quality, the outputs will also be of high quality. Similarly, if the inputs and the process are of low quality, the outputs will also be of low quality. The three components are, therefore, not independent. They are interdependent and complement each other. Under the inputs, the study considers that, in order to have quality education, the SMCs must play all their roles, such as promotion of adherence to financial and procurement procedures, promotion of overall school performance, promotion of advocacy, support to school programs, promotion of a conducive environment, supporting learners with diverse needs, promotion of a resilient school environment and sustainability of programs and interventions. These variables are constant and common to all schools.

Quality as inputs implies high quality is seen in the high level of ensuring that all these roles are performed. The process component highlights the need for the SMCs to know their roles, which are the inputs. The study highlights the importance of the SMCs being trained on their roles, which will, in turn, lead to effectiveness in discharging these roles. The inputs and process components then result in the outputs component. This is composed of improved teaching and learning processes, effective teaching, and learning, increased teachers“

competence, higher students' academic achievements, improved quality education, and well-educated school graduates.

The conceptual framework for the study has been illustrated in Figure 1.1 below:



Source: Adapted from the Open Systems Theory (1956)

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework of the study

1.9 Definitions of Operational Terms

1.10.1 Community Participation

Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018) define community participation as a process of activities comprising people's involvement in decision-making and contribution to the development effort, sharing equitably the benefits thereof.

Similarly, Ahmad (2011) defines community participation as community members' total involvement in tasks or projects that directly or indirectly affect them.

Mansuri and Rao (2013) define community participation as the active involvement of the community in project design and implementation of key objectives based on incorporating local knowledge into the project's decision-making process to bring about development.

1.10.2 Primary Education Quality

Refers to the effectiveness of the foundational stage of schooling (typically ages 6-12) in delivering equitable, inclusive and relevant learning experiences that empower children with essential knowledge, skills and values. It emphasizes not just enrollment but meaningful learning outcomes and holistic development (Vieira, 2007).

1.10.3 Education Stakeholders

Education stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organisations that have a vested interest in the success, failure, or outcomes of a education. The key stakeholders in primary education are learners, teachers, parents and guardians, government, local communities and non-governmental organisations (Caldwell, 2005).

1.10.4 School Management Committee

A School Management Committee is an elected body of the school community whose common interest is developing primary schools to promote the quality of education. The committee discharges its duties in close collaboration with the school staff, the community, and other stakeholders interested in education (Ministry of Education, 2020).

On the other hand, Osei-Owusu and Sam (2012) define a school management committee as a school community-based organisation that empowers and values community participation and aims to facilitate quality education delivery.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the study's introduction, including the importance of education and community participation in education management. It also presented a background of community participation in Malawi. It also argues for the necessity of carrying out this study to assess the situation on the ground in light of these initiatives. Furthermore, it argues about the study's significance to stakeholders, including the SMCs, education officials, and other researchers. The chapter also describes the theoretical framework used in the research – the

Open Systems Theory, which advocates for organisations to become part and parcel of the organisations in which they are situated. The next chapter is a review of relevant literature, which will situate this study within the existing discourse.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter is a review of the literature about SMCs as guided by the objectives of the study. Several authors have written on the question of education. Furthermore, they have highlighted several issues that may enable or impede the efficacy of such education interventions in achieving the expected goals. This section, therefore, aims to situate the present study within the existing discourse. It reviews the existing literature on the subject to see what is already done to use them as a guide in undertaking this research. This review will examine education as a right and enabler of other rights, the education and development nexus, and the importance and rationale of community participation in education. It will focus on school-based management through School Management Committees, their roles, effectiveness and challenges.

2.2 Quality Education

Scholars in different paradigms have explained quality in education, though there is consensus on some essential aspects. Tshabangu and Msafiri (2013) define quality education based on processes that include the amount of direct instruction, active learning, and extent of time. They further argue that test scores and graduation rates can be the determinants of quality education. On the other hand, UNICEF (2019) conceptualises quality education as a kind of education with healthy learners who are well-nourished, ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities. Education that provides environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive. It also provides adequate resources and facilities. UNESCO (2020) suggests that the content of quality education is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy, life skills, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace. It is a process through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.

It can be noted from the above concepts that the definitions of quality in education are a complex phenomenon that embeds political, cultural and economic contexts. Each sphere has an influence on the provision of quality education in the sense that education is there to produce individuals who can function in a given society. The social system functions well if the

individuals within it are trained to understand their roles in transforming society for sustainable development.

Quality education in this study is a dependent variable affected by SMCs performance as an independent variable. The adaptation of the Open Systems Theory model to suit the study has put the concept of quality at the centre as a dependent variable whereby actions performed by SMCs in context, input, process and product alter their state. The assessment of quality, according to Tshabangu and Msafiri (2013), seems to be well-matched with the contextual framework of this study as it is adapted from the Open Systems Theory as it involves seeing quality in environment (context), input, process and outcome (product). Open school systems view schools as constantly interacting with their environments. In fact, they need to structure themselves to deal with forces in the world around them. In contrast, a closed system theory views schools as sufficiently independent to solve most of their problems through their internal forces without taking into account forces in the external environment. Systems theory works on the inside and outside of the organisation as a way of understanding and anticipating the consequences of any decision (Ahrweiler, 2011). The interaction between students, parents and teachers is part of the transformation process in schools. The output may be students' knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes. Feedback serves as a control mechanism. Negative feedback from the outputs or environment can be used to correct deficiencies in the learning process. The inputs are used to teach students, who are then exported into the outside environment. These graduates continue to contribute energy to the school system in the form of one or more resources (human, financial, physical, or information). The improvement of quality involves the design of an educational system that not only optimises the relationship among the elements but also between the educational system and its environment, in this case, the community, through governing bodies such as SMCs. In general, this means designing a system that is more open, organic, pluralistic, and complex. Such a system must interact with constantly changing (multiple) environments and coordinate with many other systems in the environment, coping with constant change, uncertainty, and ambiguity while maintaining the ability to co-evolve with the environment by changing itself and transforming the environment. In addition, that system lives and deals creatively with change, welcomes complex and ambiguous situations and does not just tolerate them. This will undoubtedly improve the quality of education within a school, which is very important because, nowadays, quality plays a vital role in education.

2.3 Community participation in education

Education is not only a fundamental right but also a critical enabler of other rights, serving as the cornerstone for personal growth and societal development. However, the transformative potential of education in achieving diverse goals hinges on its inclusivity, equity, and quality, as highlighted by SDG number 4 (UN, 2015). Noteworthy, achieving accessible, equitable, and quality education requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders, including governments, civil society organisations, international agencies, and local communities. This was also a vital issue in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien Declaration), which called for genuine partnerships among different actors and stakeholders to contribute towards planning, implementing, managing, and evaluating basic education programmes (Bray, 1999). This was reaffirmed in the Dakar Framework for Action, in which governments pledged to develop responsive, participatory, and accountable systems of educational governance and management (Dekker, 2010). Thus, while governments play a crucial role in formulating and implementing education policies and programs, community members are vital change agents. Their active involvement in decision-making processes, resource mobilisation, and implementation of education initiatives is essential for addressing local needs and ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of education interventions.

The participatory paradigm influences this contemporary thinking about community participation, which rests on devolving decision-making power (Dekker, 2010). Silberstein (2023) notes that, while there are many potential forms the community-school relationship can take, school committees have become the development sector's go-to paradigm. This is so as school committees are a way to decentralise decision-making in local schools to a community-level institution (Silberstein, 2023) and a vehicle to encourage participatory school management (Shibuya, 2013).

Even locally, the government of Malawi acknowledges that the promotion of access to and quality of primary education requires a combined effort from all stakeholders. Thus, local communities' role as key stakeholders cannot be overemphasised, as local communities form the essential third element that brings together government and development partners to ensure greater access to better-quality education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004). Thus, the government of Malawi recognises communities as critical stakeholders in implementing education policies and strategies (Ministry of Education, 2020). That is why, to enhance community participation in education, the Education Act of 2013 mandates that

communities participate in the everyday running of schools within their communities through School Management Committees (SMCs) (Ministry of Education, 2020). This is not new, as even the Education Act (1962) mandated that every school have a School Management Committee composed of community members (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004). Thus, constructive and meaningful participation from non-state agencies like the School Management Committee on the operations of primary schools in Malawi is imperative (Ministry of Education, 2004).

2.4 Rationale for Community Participation in School Management

Different authors have advanced arguments in support of community participation in school management. The first argument is that it leads to an increased sense of community ownership. When people work together on a task, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership than if the task is performed for them by someone else (Bray, 1999). Secondly, it has been argued that it leads to prudent and judicious use of community resources to benefit all because members are willing to ensure that available scarce resources are not wasted (Aryeh-Adjei, 2021). Similarly, it leads to increased available resources, whether human and material as well as financial, through the contributions of different stakeholders (Bray, 1999). Furthermore, it has been argued that it may lead to strengthening and increasing accountability in school management among duty-bearers to right-holders who are the community at large (Ahiabor, 2017; Aryeh-Adjei, 2021).

It has also been argued that SMC provides a platform for broadened and shared decision-making by bringing together representatives of different stakeholders (Ministry of Education, 2020). Furthermore, communities are better placed and have more substantial incentives to make decisions in the interests of their children than anyone else in the system because they know that this will benefit their children and the community. Secondly, the community are better placed to make these decisions because they know more about their schools than technocratic “experts” in the Ministry of Education ever could, and they can use local information and relationships to monitor schools more efficiently than more distant civil servants (Bruns et al., 2011; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Patrinos et al., 2009).

Another rationale is that this leads to increased community satisfaction mainly because they are aware of everything happening as they are part of it. This increases community involvement, including financing (Patrinos et al., 2009). On the same note, participation allows

community members as principal stakeholders to influence their development agenda and process, reflecting and serving their interests and aspirations (Dekker, 2010). It has also been pointed out that the creation of partnerships between different members of the community and other stakeholders within the education system leads to increased effectiveness through shared experiences and expertise by bringing together their knowledge and skills. In addition, through division of labour, partners can also concentrate on the tasks they do best. This can also be done through mutual support (Bray, 1999), who argued that there is extended reach as different partners may have voices in various places.

In conclusion, Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018) state that community participation increases the mobilisation of financial, human and material resources to make the educational system efficient and to adapt education to the needs, problems, aspirations and interests of all sections of the population, especially the weaker section. On the same note, Sehwat and Roy (2021) argue that substantial and sustained community participation in the management of schools can not only enhance transparency and accountability in the education system but also promote a sense of ownership, agency and responsibility for positive change.

2.5 Level of knowledge of SMC members on their roles in ensuring quality primary education

It has to be pointed out that for every institution, organisation or individual to fulfil their mandate, they must be aware of their expected roles. This is because people can only be expected to effectively carry out the roles they are aware of. In this case, they will either fail to carry out those roles, or they may do so in a manner that is inconsistent with the expectations and mandate and may have negative results. Thus, SMC members' awareness of their responsibilities is foundational to effective school governance. As SMCs have taken prominence as a vehicle for community participation in education management, several studies have been done which included a component on evaluating their levels of knowledge as regards the roles that they are expected to play in line with existing policies and legal instruments in their polities. These studies have revealed that awareness and understanding of these roles are crucial for the effective functioning of SMCs.

SMC roles can neither be ascribed nor fulfilled if there is no knowledge as to what these roles are. A study by Kaimenyi (2013) emphasised that SMC members' awareness of their responsibilities is foundational to effective school governance. It further highlighted the

significance of continuous training and capacity-building programs to enhance SMC members' knowledge. According to the study, in Uganda, the Universal Primary Education policy stipulates that SMCs should do school planning, supervise/monitor school programmes, advise the headteacher on management and mobilise parents to participate in school programmes. However, when SMC members in one of the education districts of Masindi were asked what they thought their roles were, they all came up with different answers. For example, 33% of respondents believe they should monitor school activities; 33% feel they should motivate and retain teachers; 16% believe their roles should be around planning and budgeting; and only 8% feel they should be sensitising communities and raising awareness of UPE or making decisions in schools. Data from parents communicates another message: the SMCs' primary role should be to mobilise and sensitise communities (63%), followed by the planning and development of schools (31%). This indicates that when there is a lack of knowledge, the SMCs cannot function properly.

A study conducted in Tanzania by Teddy (2019) found that SMCs were aware of their roles and responsibilities, whilst on the other hand, in a study done in India, Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018) found that the majority of the members of the school management and development committees (SMDC) were not aware of their role and responsibilities in school management and that most members were not oriented about their roles and responsibilities. As a result, the members blindly followed others in performing their roles. However, the study found unique variations in knowledge about their roles among members of SMDCs. The same study also found that the awareness level of chairpersons of SMDCs was more than that of the other members.

According to the study findings in Uganda, Mugabe (2019) found that School Management Committee members in some schools seem to need help understanding their roles. On the same note, in a study done in Tanzania, Tieng'o (2018) found that there is a lack of awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the parents as well as SMC members, which they identified to be one of the factors that proved to magnify the ill environment of teaching and learning. Similarly, Nyandro, Mapfamo and Makoni (2013), in a study done in Zimbabwe, found that SMC members were unaware of the management of funds, budget preparation, decision making and raising funds. In another study done in India, Sethi and Muddgal (2017) found that few SMC members knew the SMC functions. Noteworthy, all these studies pointed out a lack

of training or inadequate training to cause this lack of comprehensive knowledge among SMC members about their roles and responsibilities.

School Management Committee with members whose awareness of their responsibilities is inadequate could amount to what Bukenya and King (2012) refer to as contextual difficulties and a failure to design strategies and approaches suitable for particular contexts, which are bound to inflict more challenges for the intended development objectives. For instance, Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018) found that most of the members of the SMDC had yet to go through training, and they needed to be made aware of their roles and responsibilities in school management. The members blindly followed others in performing their roles. On the other hand, Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018) found that many times, even where the trainings were offered, the training programmes were confined to informing the participants about their responsibilities; no information was given about their powers, functions and effective leadership at the school level. Consequently, since the parent members of school management development committees were unaware of their powers, the head teacher or the assistant teachers often dictated the terms for SMDCs (Priyadarshinee & Gowramma, 2018). However, for School Management Committees to be active institutions in regulating and managing schools, they must understand its importance, know their responsibilities and perform efficiently (Dwivedi & Naithani, 2015; Sele, 2020). That is why all the studies above further highlighted the significance of continuous training and capacity-building programs to enhance SMC members' knowledge.

In contrast, a study by Nishimura (2017) in Kenya suggested that while knowledge is crucial, it is not the sole determinant of effective SMC functioning. The research pointed out that other factors, such as motivation and active involvement of SMC members, also play a significant role in the successful implementation of their responsibilities. This perspective highlights the multifaceted nature of SMC effectiveness and the need to consider various factors beyond knowledge alone.

Another notable aspect of SMCs' knowledge of their role is that location may influence their level of expertise. For instance, those in urban areas may be more knowledgeable than those in rural areas. As pointed out by Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018), based on their study done in India, in rural areas, the awareness level of the SMDC members is deficient, whilst, in some semi-urban schools, the awareness level of the SMDC members is found to be better.

In conclusion, the findings of such studies vary. Some found that members of the SMCs are aware of their roles and responsibilities, while others found results that were of the opposite view. However, it must be noted that there are many variations in such knowledge, as some SMC members may be aware of some roles but not others. In many cases, the roles often mentioned were related to what have been the traditional roles of SMCs, such as community and resource mobilisation, infrastructure development, monitoring and follow-up on teacher and learner attendance and the like, but lack knowledge of some critical areas such as planning, monitoring, procurement and holding education primary actors accountable. Furthermore, another notable aspect is that location may influence the level of knowledge, with those in urban areas being more knowledgeable than those in rural areas.

2.6 Effectiveness of School Management Committees in Improving Educational Quality

The constitution of a School Management Committee, whether as a community initiative or in response to legal and policy demands, is not an end in itself. The SMCs are constituted for a reason. Abreh (2017) argued that the SMC should enhance the school and its community by working in the school's interest. Its utility can only be appreciated in its effectiveness in carrying out its roles and responsibilities in improving education quality. More importantly, as Chua and Mosha (2015) assert, the kind of school management impacts a particular school's performance by ensuring workable and agreeable strategies in providing effective teaching and learning. In line with this, several studies have been carried out to assess the effectiveness of the SMCs in carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

In a study done in Tanzania, Teddy (2019) found that SMCs are very active in the day-to-day school supervision, monitoring capitation grants in cooperation with the school management and with transparency to the community. Furthermore, SMCs played a significant role in preparing and arranging parent meetings, which improved students' academic performance. Additionally, SMCs played a substantial role in maintaining good student behaviour and discipline to enhance students' academic performance. Similarly, Adong (2018) found that effective supervisory roles and improvement in planning and organising increased the performance of primary schools in Lamwo district, Uganda. On the same note, Rout (2014), in a study done in India, found that the School Management Committees help in improving the retention and achievement level of all children, in effective management of schools, to achieve universal enrolment and enhancement of the standards. Further to that, in Obuasi Municipality,

Ghana, Jean-Pierre (2013) found that SMCs participated in the administration of primary schools by taking part in decision-making, providing school furniture and repairing broken down ones.

Likewise, in Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality of Ghana, Andoh-Robertson, Effah, Eshun, and Kwasi (2020) found that the SMCs performed the majority of their activities, including general meetings, school visits, monitoring school attendance and capitation grants, helping teachers' accommodations, ensuring school accountability, settling school disputes, enrolment drive and school retention. However, the study found that their performance in critical areas, such as financial accountability and attendance at executive meetings, was feeble. Noteworthy, the study found that contrary to some studies, it was observed that there was a weak positive significant correlation between SMC performance and academic performance in schools. Nonetheless, they pointed out that the SMCs' performance might be one of the factors associated with school academic performance. Similarly, in a study done in Uganda, Mugabe (2019) found that SMCs were effective in their roles of approving the school development plans and budgets, monitoring the way the school funds are used, mobilising funds to complement insufficient government grants in schools; monitoring the head teacher, teachers and pupils in schools; and participating in general management of the schools. However, only 51.1% participated in the procurement of school equipment and the construction of school infrastructure.

On the other hand, the findings of the study in two districts in Ghana by Abreh (2017) showed that the state of stakeholder involvement and participation in school-based management was not well coordinated; school governance structures were not fully operational at their best; the work of the School Management Committees was usually left to the Chairman; There was a limited collaboration between the entire SMC membership and the schools they serve; and committee planning and implementation issues were significant concerns. On the same note, a study by Geoffrey (2013) in Tanzania found that the involvement of school committees in resources and project management was almost less effective because most decisions and supervision of projects were left in the hands of the teachers. The roles that school committees played in mobilising school resources were minimal. As a result, schools still needed more resources.

In Delhi, India, Meena and Roy (2021) found challenges in the SMCs' effectiveness in carrying out their roles as 63.85 per cent of SMC members did not involve themselves in the process of

improving the performance level of students, and only 52.56 per cent of members involved themselves in the monitoring of the admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child. Beasley and Huillery (2017), studying the short-term impacts of grants to school committees in 1000 schools in Niger, explicitly link their disappointing results to poor parent decision-making. In their experiment, parent-led school committees directed the new funds toward specific spending categories, like school infrastructure, and underinvested in teaching and learning. They conclude that parents may be “willing but unable” to make optimal management decisions for schools due to low capacity, such as a lack of time and expertise to increase the quality of education.

In Malawi, Dekker (2010) found that while schools may officially have formal structures designed to facilitate community and parental involvement, there is often a large gap between intent and outcome. This is so because even when parents nominally participate in school management, they may have a limited say. In some contexts, ‘participation’ is confined to raising money, with limited influence over its use. Watkins and Ashforth (2019) made similar observations as they found out that in Malawi, the typical school committee exists mainly as a vehicle for the head teacher to raise additional funds from the community. Noteworthy, as observed by the Government of Malawi, while many studies have confirmed that Malawi communities do participate in school-based governance when given the opportunity, it is less clear that this decision-making aspect of participation improves schooling (GoM, 2019).

Others have also made similar observations and conclusions. For instance, in their systematic review, Carr-Hill et al. (2016) found that decentralising decision-making in schools has minor to moderate positive effects in reducing repetition and dropouts and increasing test scores. These effects are mainly restricted to middle-income countries, with fewer and smaller positive effects found in low-income countries or disadvantaged communities. Similarly, Uzor (2017) states that when functional, SBMCs improve intermediate outcomes, such as school resources and student enrollment; however, there is little evidence to suggest they improve students' learning outcomes. Because SMCs vary widely in functionality—based on differences in local politics, poverty, and other contextual and cultural factors—the ability of SMCs to engender collective action seems to differ based on the quality of their leadership.

In conclusion, it has been observed that the results of the different studies on the effectiveness of School Management Committees in carrying out their roles and responsibilities are mixed, with some being positive while others are not. It is worth noting that, as was the case with the

knowledge of roles and responsibilities, these SMCs were effective in some roles and responsibilities while not in others. What is coming out is that the devolution of decision-making power to schools and communities only automatically results in the exercise of devolved power due to social structure, the attitude and culture of individuals and organisations, and political intervention in community participation. It is also important to note that the types of participation vary depending on the purpose of the involvement and the actual power devolved to the community. The related works of literature reveal that education provision is a partnership between governments and parents, but it is still a challenge to have meaningful participation from parents through SMCs. This is due to various factors, such as poverty, ignorance, misuse of funds, and society's culture.

2.7 Challenges that SMCs Face in Carrying out Their Roles and Responsibilities

The ability of SMCs to carry out their roles is also influenced by factors obtained in the environment in which they work. Several challenges may affect the extent to which they can be effective in this regard. The following section reviews SMCs' challenges, as discussed in different literature.

2.7.1 Power and Influence

The first challenge that SMCs face is the degree of power they wield, which influences what the School Management Committee can or cannot do. To start with, Silberstein (2023) looks at the effectiveness of the SMCs as being directly linked to the degree of power devolved in them, which determines what they can or cannot do. He argues that school committees differ in the degree of decision-making power that is devolved in them. Weak committees may serve in an advisory role, more vital committees may have more substantial monitoring responsibilities, and the most robust bodies may wield independent power over the school's financial, managerial, and operational decisions (Silberstein, 2023). He further points out that most school committees are weak and can only exercise a limited form of “school management”. In this regard, with narrow management powers, school committees often cannot change how parents or community members make claims about schools (Silberstein, 2023).

Silberstein (2023) further argues that there is some evidence that teachers see “school management” decisions by school committees as illegitimate forms of accountability. This is

linked to limitations, real or perceived, on the capability of parents and community members. In a study done in Malawi, Watkins and Ashforth (2019) found that community members' low social, educational, and financial status relative to teachers severely constrains their voice. School committees and parent-teacher associations have circumscribed interactions with school staff and exist mainly as vehicles for fundraising. Similarly, Rashid (2014), in a study carried out in Blantyre, Malawi, found that despite the findings that there was a positive relationship between members of SMC and teachers, some education officials felt they were the decision-makers and the community had to follow or implement their decisions.

These findings are not isolated as Muthoni (2015), in a study conducted in Machakos county, Kenya, found that in most cases, schools' leaders or administrators did not attempt to establish a partnership with the community in the surroundings, believing that the community members are irrelevant to the schooling process. On the same note, school leaders or administrators believed that most of the community members were illiterate or had a low educational background at that time; anything to do with school was intimidating to them. Thus, it can be appreciated that, in this case, the influence the School Management Committee can exert in carrying out its roles and responsibilities will be constrained.

Another example along the same lines is from Ghana, where Andoh-Robertson¹, Effah, Eshun and Kwasi (2020) found that SMC members failed to assist in ensuring school accountability because some of the school heads did not engage them in school financial issues and that enquiring into such issues often raised tension between them and the school authorities. Thus, there was a lack of transparency in school finance, and the SMCs failed to perform their role of serving as checks and balances on the school administration to stop leakages in resource flow as they occurred. Similarly, Geoffrey (2013), in Tanzania, found that the involvement of school committees in resources and project management was almost less effective because most decisions and supervision of projects were left in the hands of the teachers. As observed by Mugabe (2019), based on findings of a study done in Uganda, a lack of independence in decision-making in schools by SMCs tends to hinder their effectiveness in improving education service delivery. He observes that much as the Education Act 2008 [of Uganda] mandates the SMCs to undertake school duties and responsibilities, the power and authority to run schools still lies with the local and central government rather than at the school level.

Compounding the above is the inability of the system to adapt to the community participation and bottom-up paradigm by remaining conservative and rigid. Silberstein (2023) argued that

the bureaucracy affords little space to school committees in line with the state's motives to safeguard control over schools. He further points out that the main levers of accountability, such as setting the school budget, making human resource decisions, selecting the curriculum, and monitoring outcomes, are primarily left outside school committees' remit. Instead, the bureaucracy outsources specific managerial responsibilities to school committees that essentially have to do with inputs, such as fundraising for the school, spending a small discretionary budget, or monitoring teacher attendance. He observes that as a result, school committees are effectively absorbed into the "management" relationship and endowed with limited power that makes any direct relationship of accountability between them and the school unenforceable. Adding his voice to the debate, Rashid (2014) argues that simply granting "school governance" responsibilities to school committees is unlikely, in and of itself, to allow them to be effective unless they are backstopped by support from other parts of the system.

2.7.2 Capacity Constraints

The second challenge concerns the capacity to carry out the expected roles and responsibilities. As Shibuya (2013) sums it, often, School Management Committees are not correctly functioning for various reasons: sometimes, the committee members cannot fully understand their mandates and responsibilities due to the lack of the government's efforts to provide necessary guidance and support in the management of the committees, or the local educational administration did not get involved as they should; and at other times, School Management Committees could not fulfil their expected functions owing to lack of proper training opportunities.

Similarly, Rao (2009) made observations based on a study in India that showed that many responsibilities were put on the communities in the name of participation. However, not much was done in terms of capacity building. Without proper capacity building, SMCs and community members are constrained in their roles and responsibilities. For instance, Mugabe (2019), based on a study done in Uganda, found out that in some schools, School Management Committee members seem to need help understanding their roles according to the study findings. Even those who understood their roles were not discharging them due to the lack of a full mandate, thus hindering efficient education service delivery. Similarly, Srivastava (2018) found that School Management Committees face many challenges, including a lack of clarity on policy guidelines, low community awareness and inadequate capacity building of members.

On the same note, Dekker (2010) found that participants may need more knowledge about issues under discussion, such as school performance and teaching practices. Parents may lack the expertise or confidence to appraise approaches to pedagogy or curriculum effectively, observing that poor, illiterate parents with limited school experience are at a particular disadvantage. Rashid (2014) also made the same observations based on a study of 30 primary schools in Blantyre, Malawi, where he found that when the government of Malawi came up with a strategy of community participation in primary school management, SMCs expected to be trained. However, such training was rigid or slow to come by; as a result, some SMCs did not know what to do.

2.7.3 Limited Sources of Information

Another critical challenge is limited information sources, which in turn may influence what kind of information the SMCs get and have to base their work on. For instance, SMCs did not have alternative education information sources apart from the official line of communication, Rashid (2014). The main challenge with this situation is that those responsible may choose what kind of information to give the SMCs based on their different interests.

Marphantia, Edge, Legault and Archer (2010) in Improving Learners Outcome in Primary Schools Project (ILOPS) data from Malawi, Senegal, Uganda and Burundi suggest that most SMCs' involvement in school activities is mostly limited to attending meetings initiated by school staff. They do not actively influence school management nor do they work with community leaders to hold schools accountable for improving learning. They continue to observe that this could be because most parents have limited knowledge of their children's learning requirements, other than the obvious need for basic supplies of books, pens and uniforms. This could be because most schools especially in rural areas depend on teachers as sources for information.

There is also very little monitoring of children's performance or dialogue around teaching and learning strategies. They observed that one key reason for this is the lack of training for School Management Committees and for school staff. They believed that this is compounded by the poor relations that exist in many situations between staff and communities. They concluded that communities often lack confidence to deal with better educated teachers, while at the same time, teachers often fear and resent School Management Committees as they see them as a potential mechanism to exercise power and control over them.

In Burundi and Uganda the ILOPS research teams found that SMCs are typically unaware or confused about their roles and responsibilities related to their roles. Even in instances where policies have created a larger role for SMCs with respect to school matters (e.g. in Uganda), members rarely feel confident in their own abilities to fulfil these requirements. Researchers found that parents perceive that the ‘free education’ policy blocks their involvement in schools. This interpretation of the policy raises a potentially more fundamental issue – parents are uncertain of how to be involved beyond financial contributions. This is particularly acute where parents are not literate themselves –either because they never went to school or they dropped out early. Tieng’o (2018), observed that factors that proved to magnify the ill environment of teaching and learning included a lack of awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the parents as well as SMC members; poor means of communication and information sharing between school administration and community; lack of management capacity among members of the committees; and lack of financial resources for intended activities in their locality.

2.8 Literature Gap

The literature review reveals several gaps that warrant further investigation to advance knowledge and practices in community-driven education governance. Research has yet to deeply assess the effectiveness of training programs designed for community leaders, such as School Management Committees (SMCs), in enhancing their managerial skills and overall efficacy (Rajapaksa et al., 2020). There is a notable gap in understanding the impact of different training methodologies, content relevance, delivery formats, and long-term outcomes on capacity building among community leaders (Burlison & Myburgh, 2018). Moreover, challenges persist in the accessibility and dissemination of guidelines to community leaders, particularly concerning the absence of translations into local languages (Acheampong et al., 2019). This highlights the need for research focusing on innovative strategies to enhance guideline accessibility, including the development of multilingual versions and targeted dissemination approaches (Isaacs & Nkomo, 2021). Such research can evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in improving guideline uptake and implementation by SMCs.

There is a dearth of longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of capacity-building initiatives on SMCs' performance and sustainability (Brown & Green, 2016). Such studies would offer insights into the enduring impact of training programs, ongoing challenges faced

by SMCs, and strategies for sustaining effective governance practices (Williams et al., 2021). Addressing these research gaps can contribute significantly to enhancing community-led education governance and improving the quality of education in schools.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The review of the literature above has shown that education in general and primary education, in particular, is critical as it is a driver of development with far-reaching benefits that extend beyond individual attainment to encompass societal progress through human capital development, economic progress, poverty alleviation, improved health outcomes, social and political participation, social cohesion and gender equality among others. It examined education as a right and enabler of other rights, the education and development nexus, and the importance and rationale of community participation in education. It also focused on school-based management through school management committees, their roles, effectiveness and challenges.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This section outlines the design and methodology employed in the study. It encompasses the research approach, research design, study location, sample and sampling techniques, data collection methods, and approaches to data analysis. Additionally, ethical considerations guiding the research process are discussed.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The term paradigm is derived from the Greek word pattern (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and has been broadly defined by many academics. Fraser and Robinson (2004) further argued that a paradigm is a set of beliefs about how particular problems exist and a set of agreements on how such problems can be investigated. In essence, paradigms represent the researcher's beliefs and values about the world, how they define it, and how they work within it. In relation to research, the researcher's thoughts and beliefs about any issues explored would subsequently guide their actions. In other words, the paradigm adopted directs the researcher's investigation, including data collection and analysis procedures. Paradigm, therefore, has important implications for every decision made in the research process (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This study adopted the Interpretivist Paradigm to guide the research method, instruments, and data interpretation.

According to DeJaeghere, et al. (2020), an Interpretivist Paradigm seeks to understand human behaviour and social contexts by understanding the meanings actors give to their actions, goals, roles, identities, and all aspects of the world they experience. This research operates under the assumption that there is no single unitary reality apart from one's perceptions. Since each individual's experiences are from their point of view, they each experience a different reality. As such, the phenomenon of "multiple realities" exists. Consequently, the use of interpretivism and its methods is an attempt to not aggregate across individuals on the grounds that each individual is unique. In addition, the researcher is unique, and all research is essentially biased by each researcher's perceptions. There is no point in trying to "establish validity" in any external or objective sense. People impose order on the world perceived in an effort to construct meaning; meaning lies in cognition, not in elements external to us; information impinging on our cognitive systems is screened, translated, altered, and perhaps rejected by the knowledge that already exists in that system; the resulting knowledge is idiosyncratic and purposefully constructed (Lythcott & Duschl, 1990).

The aim of this study, to examine the performance of School Management Committees (SMCs) in public primary schools through the eyes of various participants, is best suited to an interpretive qualitative approach. This is because the research seeks to understand human behaviour and social contexts by understanding the meanings actors give to their actions, goals, roles, identities, and all aspects of the world they experience to get the 'real story', which can only be achieved if this approach was used. In this case, the Interpretivist Paradigm guided the study's methodology to yield a rich understanding of the usefulness of SMCs in the management of Schools in the context of three primary schools. The phenomenon under study was explored from multiple perspectives through a triangulated approach of data sources and interpretivism data collection methods.

3.3 Research Approach

The study was cross-sectional and used a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods were chosen because they are well-suited for exploring complex educational phenomena, including investigating the "how" and "why" questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which are central to understanding the intricate dynamics of educational processes such as community participation and school governance. Furthermore, qualitative methods generate rich, detailed data that capture the depth and breadth of participants' experiences and perceptions. Through open-ended questions and probing techniques, researchers can elicit a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the effectiveness and impact of SMCs on primary education quality. Qualitative research also offers flexibility in adapting to the evolving nature of the research context (Miles et al., 2020). This is so as it allows researchers to explore emergent themes and follow up on unexpected findings, thereby enriching the depth of analysis. It also enables the exploration of multiple perspectives and voices, fostering a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. By triangulating data from different sources and perspectives, researchers can generate comprehensive insights that capture the complexity and diversity of experiences, in this case, related to SMCs in primary education. In conclusion, drawing on insights from educational research methodology literature, the qualitative approach is well-justified for exploring the role of School Management Committees (SMCs) in improving primary education quality in the Njengwa Zone. Qualitative methods offer unique advantages in uncovering complex phenomena, understanding contextual nuances, capturing subjective meanings, adapting to dynamic contexts, amplifying diverse voices, and enhancing the research findings' depth and richness.

3.4 Research Site

The study was conducted in Njelengwa Education Zone in Chitipa district. Chitipa is the northernmost district in Malawi, and Njelengwa is the northernmost zone in Malawi. It borders Tanzania on the east and Zambia on the west. This site was chosen because, first, Njelengwa mirrors most zones in Malawi, which are in the rural areas. As such, some of the study's results could be replicated elsewhere. Another reason is that there have been no similar studies regarding community participation in education in general and the role of School Management Committees in particular conducted in the study area. Lastly, the Zone was chosen because of the ease of access to the area.

3.5 Research Design

Research design has been described as the glue that holds together all the elements in a research project and is used to structure the research. It assists in planning, structuring and executing the research to maximise the validity of the findings, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998). Due to the fact that this research is interpretive qualitative, a case study design was employed to gain an in-depth study of the performance of SMCs in schools by analysing variables such as people, events, decisions, or other social systems within them.

A case study is an exploratory study, which leads to the ideal plan of confining the study to a small sample that is investigated in depth, allowing the researcher to have direct interaction with participants. In qualitative research, a case study research design is flexible and allows for dealing with a variety of evidence, which leads to the triangulation of data (Bhattacharjee, 2012). This is the reason why this research employed this design to maximise its potential to provide realistic opinions since it offers opportunities for in-depth inquiry through the use of multiple instruments. The design helped examine the effectiveness of the SMCs and determine if they contribute to quality issues.

In this study, the case study design provided an opportunity for the researcher to study the SMCs in their real-life context and collect data through interviews, FGDs, and review of relevant documents. Such research processes ensured the topic's exploration through various lenses, which allowed significant insights to emerge.

3.6 Sampling

This section discusses the study population, sampling techniques and sample size.

3.6.1 Study Population

According to Creswell (2014), a study population is an aggregation of elements from which the survey sample is actually selected. A sample, therefore, is the group of individuals who participate in a study, and a population is the broader group of people to whom the study results will apply. This case study of three public primary schools targeted a population of sixty-two (62), which included one (1) Primary Education Adviser (PEA), three (3) school head teachers (HT), twenty (20) teachers, and twenty-seven (27) School Management Committee (SMC) members. The schools included were three (3) public primary schools.

3.6.2 Sampling Techniques

Sampling is important in qualitative research since it contributes towards the selection of correctly informing the population for a study. A sample is defined as a subset of a population (Creswell, 2014), and it categorises the population according to a specific status. It provides numbers of the expected sample in a specific category. The study used both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Non-probability sampling techniques, through purposive sampling, were used to select key informants and focus group discussion participants. The non-probability sampling techniques have the strength of tapping into the humanistic elements of participants (Flick, 2014; Mohajan, 2018).

Non-probability sampling techniques, through purposive sampling, were used to select key informants and focus group discussion participants. These key informants were chosen based on their position and assumption that they are knowledgeable and would add much value to the study. These included the Primary Education Adviser (PEA), school head teachers, some teachers, and the Chair of the School Management Committee. On the other hand, probability sampling was used to select teachers. This was done through the use of a simple random sampling technique from a sampling frame of all other teachers. This was done to ensure that all teachers have equal chances of being selected so that there is no selection bias. These two approaches were complimented by snowballing as the researcher identified other critical informants through his interviews with the initial respondents. Some respondents or community members recommended others they felt were well-informed and could add value to the study.

The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. This study, as such, used this method because it seeks cases that are rich in information which can be studied in greater depth about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. This criterion allowed the researcher to focus on people who were most likely to experience, know about, or have insights into the research topic. The PEA was targeted as the top overall manager of the Zone, while the HT is the one who runs the school. The SMC Chair guides the SMC operations, and their input in this research was necessary. As representatives of the governing body and the leading case in this study, the SMC members were more purposeful. In addition, members of the SMC were targeted as partners in school governance who are entrusted with the responsibility of supporting the establishment and operations of SMCs in schools. Teachers were selected because of their years at the schools and vast experience with the SMC system.

Sometimes, participants in the study are selected based on their availability, convenience, and volunteerism. As such, convenience sampling was used to identify available and willing participants to participate in the interviews and FGDs. The assumption was that all the population had knowledge of the topic under study.

3.6.3 Sample Size

The targeted population in the three sampled schools was a heterogeneous group from different school contexts and cultures. Cresswell and Poth (2018) suggest that studies of more heterogeneous groups require larger sample sizes of more than 20 interviews, enough to uncover a variety of opinions before reaching saturation point. This study's sample size of 34 participants was predetermined considering resources and time factors. This sample comprised one (1) Primary Education Adviser (PEA), three (3) school head teachers (HT), 9 teachers, and 21 SMC members. However, upon reaching saturation point, thirty-four participants were engaged in interviews and focus group discussions. This sample included twenty-five semi-structured (SSI) interviews with one PEA, 3 head-teachers, nine teachers, and 21 SMC members in three different school settings.

In addition, twenty-one SMC members were engaged in focus group discussions. The sampling procedure for FGDs was also purposive to ensure that participants were diverse and that their contributions would add value to the study. The focus group discussions targeted the SMC. The idea was to hear from the members who were involved in the activities to ensure that the

findings represented the members' actual experiences. The researcher conducted a focus group discussion with the SMCs at each school.

Table 3.1 provides a summary of participants per school.

Table 3.1 Summary of the participants of the study

SN	Institution/School	Category of Respondents	Total Participants
	Njelengwa Zone	PEA	1
1	School A	Headteacher	1
		Teachers	3
		SMC	8
2	School B	Headteacher	1
		Teachers	2
		SMC	7
3	School C	Headteacher	1
		Teachers	4
		SMC	6
	TOTAL		34

Source: Researcher, (2023)

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

Three methods of data collection were used: documentary analysis, focus group discussion, and semi-structured interviews. Employing several methods was intended to understand the situations in depth (Creswell, 2014) and avoid bias.

3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) Guide

The first approach used was semi-structured interviews. As defined by Palinkas et al. (2015), semi-structured interviews involve intensive question-and-answer sessions with few respondents to explore their perspectives on a specific idea, program, or situation. These questions provided room for probing and clarification. The researcher chose semi-structured

interviews because they comprise a series of questions founded on the topic areas the researcher desires to cover, and they provide opportunities for both entities to discuss several topics in more detail. When the interviewee expresses difficulty in answering a question or provides only a passing reaction, the interviewer can resort to using cues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to consider the question further Creswell (2014). This instrument is ideal for this research because it gives the interviewer the liberty to ask for elaboration on the original answer or to follow a line of inquiry introduced by the interviewee. This is because the research is exploratory and seeks attitudinal information.

This study developed an interview guide (refer to Appendix I and II) for asking questions to guide face-to-face interviews with the PEA, HTs, SMC Chair, and sampled Teachers. The set questions were prepared in advance to guide the interviews. The researcher recorded information from interviews by making handwritten notes and audiotaping using the phone recorder. Notes were taken as backups in case of equipment failure where audio recordings were permitted.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

The focus group is a meeting style that is planned for small groups of individuals who are not related. A researcher forms the group and leads a group discussion on some exacting topic or topics (Lune & Berg, 2017). Researchers use this approach to learn through discussion about conscious, semi-conscious, and unconscious psychological and socio-cultural characteristics and processes among various groups (Creswell, 2014). The focus group discussion usually comprises six to eight people with common characteristics. These participants are encouraged to discuss a particular set of issues in a group interview. The focus group provides the moderator with an opportunity to initiate a platform from which members of the group interact with each other on a given topic (Silverman, 2011).

With this instrument, the researcher conducted discussions with SMC members in all the schools. The researcher chose this instrument because it is a rapid assessment. This semi-structured data-gathering method assisted in purposively selecting a set of participants to discuss issues and concerns based on a list of key themes of this study. It was suitable for initial concept exploration, generating creative ideas, testing ideas and determining differences in opinion between the various stakeholder groups. It also assisted in eliciting and clarifying SMC members' knowledge, attitudes and practices in education quality improvement and their roles in the issue. The aim of the study was to incorporate the SMC to get a diverse range of opinions. In each school, an FGD comprising six or seven SMC members was involved in three FGD

sessions. An average of one to two hours was spent in the discussions, depending on the satisfaction of the contributions. As stated in the interview, the researcher recorded the information in the notebook and did a tape recording after asking for consent from the informant(s).

A system of name substitution was implemented before actual discussions began to ensure confidentiality. In this case, numbers were used to identify speakers. For rapport to be developed, adequate time was allowed so that time limits would not constrain the focus group. The researcher tried to engage every participant in the discussions to get diverse opinions on the research topic. However, no focus group was stopped as long as a relevant and rich discussion was shared. All sessions were conducted outside the normal learning period to avoid disturbing lessons.

The English language was used as a means of communication in data collection for Headteachers, Teachers and some SMC members especially Chairs, whilst Chichewa was used for parents because the study was conducted in schools where English is used as a formal mode of communication whilst most parents communicate in Chilambya but can converse in Chichewa. Data collected were organised based on the research objectives. Data was also categorised into themes and subthemes. This assisted the research to give meaning to the data collected from the field.

3.7.3 Document Review Log

Document analysis includes both unsolicited and solicited documents. The collection and review of documents is a strategy commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). In this study, several documents were collected to analyse content for data triangulation and verification of themes in the data. A log was developed to keep a record of documents collected for analysis (refer to Appendix 6). As a tool in interpretive qualitative case studies, the researcher decided on the information to be extracted from the documents and analysed without manipulating the data. For an accurate understanding of the topic under study, the administration of the case study schools provided the following relevant documents for review: SMC meeting minutes, School Development Plans, Guidelines for SMCs, Financial reports, and many more (see Appendix 6). Upon analysing the secondary data in the documents, the researcher identified the critical findings recorded in the Document Review Log.

The documentary reviews in this study played a crucial role in complementing data collected through other methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions. This comprehensive

approach was designed to address research questions one and two, which sought to understand the awareness and practices of SMCs, respectively. The researcher prepared a checklist for the collection of quality improvement-associated information from the school documents, assessing three key areas: SMC meetings, frequency, agenda discussed, and Development Plan. The information in the documents, particularly the quality improvement-oriented agenda discussed in the meeting minutes, provided valuable insights into the committees' performance, specifically regarding quality improvement.

Table3:2 Document Review Log

Document Type	Date of Document	Key Information Extracted	Relevance to Research Questions
SMC Meeting Minutes	Various dates	Frequency of meetings, agendas discussed	Understanding SMC practices and awareness
School Development Plans	Annual updates	Goals and objectives for school improvement	Informing SMC roles in quality improvement
Guidelines for SMCs	Updated periodically	Roles and responsibilities of SMC members	Clarifying SMC awareness and practices
Financial Reports	Quarterly/Annually	Resource allocation and management	Evaluating SMC effectiveness in resource management
Other Relevant Documents	Varies	Additional context on SMC operations	Providing supplementary insights into SMC functions

3.8 Quality Assurance of the Data Collection Instruments

A step that should not be overlooked is the quality assurance of data collection instruments. This is the reason why the instruments for data collection were piloted before being used.

3.8.1 Pilot Testing of Instruments.

According to Creswell (2014), pilot testing is a way of rehearsing a research approach with a selected group of participants to discover flaws or gaps before conducting the main study. The SSI and FGD tools were pilot-tested in one primary school in Nkhata Bay District. Piloting aimed to ensure that the items addressed the objectives ably and that there was consistency and logical flow. Furthermore, it was meant to remove ambiguity in that how the respondents understood the questions was the same as what the researcher meant by them. It was also used to check the time it would take to ensure the sessions would not become a time constraint for the respondents as they have equally pressing endeavours requiring their time. After piloting, the instruments were revised accordingly, considering the observations made.

The first stage was the development of the data collection instruments. The contents and focus of the data collection instruments were informed by the objectives and research questions of the study, the literature review, and the researcher's knowledge. For this stage, there were two instruments: the FGD checklist, the key informants' guide for SMCs and that of the head teachers and Primary Education Adviser. However, the respondents' responses influenced the approach to the direction of the interviews. During this process, some research instruments were revised and redefined to suit the needs and level of difficulty of the participants. A probing approach was used for further explanations and insights on some raised issues. After noting that the instruments were alright based on piloting and revision, the next step was actual data collection. The researcher then sought permission from the Mzuzu University Ethical Clearance Committee.

3.9 Data Analysis

Analysis is the reasoning strategy with the objective of splitting a complex whole into its parts in order to understand the relationships of the parts (Lune & Berg, 2017). During data analysis there is breaking down of data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. The objective of the analysis is to comprehend the different constitutive parts of data by inspecting relationships between concepts and finding out if there could be any patterns or trends that can be isolated to form themes in the data.

The data collected through interviews and FGDs were in Chichewa although the local language was Lambia. Since the researcher had limited knowledge of Lambia but the participants had a passable knowledge of Chichewa it was agreed that the questions should be in Chichewa. They

were tape-recorded, transcribed, and then translated into English by the researcher. Care was observed in translation to keep the intended meaning of the information provided. In addition, some information was recorded in a notebook during interviews. Qualitative research encompasses a triangulation approach to analysing data. A diverse approach of multiple methods (triangulation) is employed for a triangulated analysis, achieved through coding and thematic analysis. Themes are patterns of order that seem to cut across various aspects of the generated data (Hoberg, 2001). The analysis was made according to three major themes grounded on the research questions, which brought meaningful interpretation and the desired results.

The school meeting minutes were arranged according to agenda items, focusing on items of the agenda that suit the quality improvement in education provision. All of the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and FGDs were then subjected to content analysis. In content analysis, raw data are read several times and coded according to similar concepts, ideas, words and phrase meanings. Then, they are organised according to emerging patterns. These can relate to research objectives and questions. They are then organised into themes and sub-themes for presentation. In the presentation, actual information from the respondents is given through quotations.

After this stage was the analysis of the data which basically involved categorising data for purposes of classification, summarisation, and tabulation (Hancock et al., 2009). During this stage, the data underwent both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The analysis was deductive because some themes had already been identified during the literature review, and it was inductive because the study generated new data. The next step during this stage was familiarisation. During this, the researcher read all the transcripts to get familiar with the data. Next was open coding, during which the data was chunked into small units. The researcher then attached a descriptor, or code, to each unit (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As part of this, the researcher first generated preliminary codes based on the topic guides using the summary sheets of the significant responses to each question. He also identified others during the data familiarisation process. These codes were constantly updated as new ones emerged when the rest of the transcripts were being reviewed to create a comprehensive thematic matrix of codes. The third stage was axial coding, whereby these codes were grouped into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, in the fourth and final stage of selective coding, the researcher develops themes that express the content of each of the groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involved grouping the data into broader categories that reflect the interviewees' issues or ideas,

which helped structure and explain how interviewees described their views and experiences. However, deductions were made only upon cross-checking and establishing consistency (or inconsistencies) with other resources and methods deployed in the study. This ensured that the veracity of individual perceptions was verified and a measure of objectivity in the conclusions established. Furthermore, trends were observed and triangulated over the multiple data sources. Data was then categorized and themes emerged as in the table below.

Table 3:3 Data Category and Themes

Data Category	Themes
Level of knowledge of SMCs on their roles in ensuring quality primary education	a. General Knowledge of the roles of SMCs b. Training done to orient the SMCs c. Attendance of meetings d. Existence of Guideline for Formation and Functioning of SMCs
Implementation of SMCs in their given roles as a means of ensuring quality in primary education	a. Extent of SMC participation in implementing school activities. b. Roles of SMCs
Challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles	a. Power and influence b. Limited sources of information c. Capacity constraints

3.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness allows for quality checking and vetting of the accuracy of the information to be collected from the participants. Trustworthiness assurance is vital in qualitative research, where the researcher's subjectivity can readily influence data interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Evaluative criteria for qualitative studies are needed to judge the vitality and truthfulness of the study findings. The evaluative aspect is usually done by checking for credibility, confirmability, and transferability of the study findings, which this study applied.

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility is the truth value of the findings and is based on the environmental and cultural context of the participants. This study used triangulation of data to achieve trustworthiness. According to Lune & Berg, 2017, trustworthiness can also be provided through triangulation

or crystallisation of data, where several investigators, sources, and methods should be used to compare the findings. When different data collection methods yield similar findings on the same research questions, the findings are judged to be credible. This helps the researcher cross-examine the integrity of responses given by respondents and reduces the possibility of bias. Triangulation minimises the risk of chance association and systematic bias due to the provision of information collected from a diverse range of individuals, teams, and settings using various sources.

Data triangulation in this study was achieved by employing three methods of collecting data and different data sources to get diverse perspectives within the same setting on all three study objectives. Audio-taped data and secondary data from documents reviewed were analysed per school to reflect the social reality of participants. The flexible semi-structured interviews played the role of collecting appropriate data. During the interview, probing was done by asking original and supplementary questions. The focus group discussions and documentary analysis gave more input on the doubt of inconsistency. The use of the Chichewa language made the data collection process even more friendly and reliable due to the fact that what was asked was well grasped and responded to accordingly. Interviews were transcribed verbatim as soon as the researcher returned from fieldwork in the same order that they were conducted. Following data analysis, case study narratives were written within the case analysis before developing a coherent and rich write-up. A theoretical framework guided data interpretation to approach the study from different perspectives and produce more credible conclusions.

3.10.2 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to establishing verifiable direct evidence from the researcher's experiences with the people. For the study's trustworthiness, the information's accuracy should be based on the researcher's credibility in taking all necessary steps that conform and apply to the principles of obtaining data as proper to the qualitative research. Since this study was guided by the interpretivism paradigm, which is subjectivist epistemology, data interpretation was based on the voice of the researcher and perspectives of participants (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017), assuring trustworthiness of the study findings through the criterion of confirmability, was pivotal.

To achieve confirmability, the researcher's assumptions and positionality were openly declared. Evidence for the study findings was systematically reported to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations were reached. Rich and verbatim descriptions of participants'

accounts were presented to support the findings. Frequent debriefing sessions with peer researchers and the research supervisor were conducted to assist in uncovering biases or assumptions that were taken for granted.

3.10.3 Transferability

Transferability indicates that relevancies can be transferred to similar situations, circumstances, and contexts (Creswell et al., 2018). The researcher is responsible for providing a ‘thick description’ of the participants and the research process to enable the reader to assess whether the findings are transferable to their setting. The researcher, thus, used rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings. Detailed descriptions of the findings, participants, and the research process, including their contexts, are given in this study.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

It is of utmost importance that scientists should not manipulate their data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures in a way that contradicts the principles of science or the scientific method or advances their agenda (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Based on the above observation, this research meticulously adhered to ethical considerations, including respect for human dignity, disclosure, voluntary participation, informed consent, harmlessness, minimising risk, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.

This study was conducted in accordance with Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) ethics procedures and at the proposal stage, the same was submitted to MZUNIREC for approval prior to any data collection or engagement with research respondents. The researcher ensured that the human dignity of the research participants was well respected. Concerning disclosure, the researcher explained clearly to the participants the purpose of the research and the vital contribution it can make. On the same note, as regards voluntary participation, informed consent, and harmlessness, the researcher explained to study participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any unfavourable consequences, and that they would not be harmed as a result of their participation or non-participation in the study. Furthermore, informed consent was sought from the participants before any interviews. Regarding privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, their identities were protected to protect the subjects’ interests and future well-being because the readers of the final research report or

paper could not identify a response with a specific respondent. Furthermore, the researcher made sure that all information gathered was kept private and confidential and used only for the purpose for which they were requested. In minimising risk, the researcher was sensitive enough to minimise the risk of physical, psychological, legal, social, and any other form of harm. Furthermore, all aspects of this research were carried out in the spirit of diversity, equality, and inclusion (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017).

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the study's design and methodology. It encompassed the approach, design, location, sample, and sampling techniques. It employed the qualitative approach using a case study design in the Njelengwa Zone. As such, it was interpretive. The obtained data was then categorised, classified, and tabulated to generate themes. Additionally, ethical considerations guiding the research process, conformability, creditability, and trustworthiness are discussed. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study, which was specifically intended to evaluate the knowledge of SMCs on their roles in ensuring quality primary education, analyse the effectiveness of the SMCs in carrying out their roles, and lastly, examine the challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. While findings and discussions are presented separately in some cases, these will be combined and done simultaneously because of the nature of this study and its qualitative approach. This study examines the roles of School Management Committees (SMCs) in improving the quality of education, specifically within the context of Njेलengwa Zone in Chitipa District in Northern Malawi. This is based on the fact that having the community participate fully by playing their roles as they were meant to in the school's management can lead to improved students' academic performance because when some roles are neglected, all roles of the vested efforts of creating a conducive environment for learning will not be achieved. In line with this, the study specifically was intended to evaluate the knowledge of SMCs on their roles in ensuring quality primary education, analyse the effectiveness of the SMCs in carrying out their roles, and lastly, examine the challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles. The presentation and discussion of findings for the study follow this order of objectives, which ensures that data collected through various methods are collated to provide a collective response to a research question (Cohen et al., 2007). The sections and subsections reflect the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data generated through semi-structured interviews (SSI), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and document analysis.

4.2 Knowledge of SMCs on their Roles in Ensuring Quality Primary Education

In line with the objective, the study wanted to know if the SMC members understand their roles as stipulated in the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, (Ministry of Education, 2022) handbook. This was premised on the fact that for the SMCs to carry out their roles, they need to know what those roles are because if they do not, they are less likely to be effective in discharging them, either by not doing them or doing them incorrectly. Below are the roles as they appear in the guideline's handbook:

4.2.1 Promotion of Adherence to Financial and Procurement Procedures

This role aims to promote adherence to financial and procurement procedures. The SMC members are supposed to develop School Improvement Plans (SIP) and budgets based on the

SIP. They are also supposed to liaise with community leaders in mobilising communities, collecting and documenting resources, banking money, and not keeping it in their personal accounts. However, the SMC members did not know that they needed approval from the District Education Office through the PEA for any planned expenditure, as they believed that this was just for the school improvement grants rather than for locally sourced resources such as school development funds as summed up in a focus group discussion at school A:

“Tinaphunzitsidwa kudzera ku pulogaramu ya Sigi(sic) koma sitinkanziwa kuti tikuyenera kusatira ndondomeko zomwezo tikamagwilitsa ntchito ndalama zathu zomwe timasonkha tokha.”

Translated as:

“We were trained through the project responsible for implementing the School Improvement Grants, but we did not know that when we use our local resources, we have to follow those guidelines.”

They could not understand why they had to go bank the money and then withdraw it and use it when they could spend it directly, considering they would have to spend extra money travelling to the bank. This could be because they needed the current Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, (Ministry of Education, 2022), which is a general guide for all financial and procurement procedures. As such, their training was based on outdated guidelines. As one Headteacher from school B puts it:

“When the Primary School Improvement Grants are disbursed, we usually have training because it is a component that the donor insists on. Although these trainings are a component of financial and procurement procedures, they are usually tailor-made to the grants themselves. In addition, we did not know there are new guidelines for SMCs.”

Furthermore, they assumed that identifying suppliers through the procurement committee is just for significant projects like construction and not every procurement, such as teaching and learning resources and other sundry for running the school.

Several authors have made similar observations regarding the roles and responsibilities of school management committees (SMCs) in promoting adherence to financial and procurement

procedures within the educational context. For instance, Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018) noted that SMC members are expected to develop plans and budgets for school improvement initiatives, collaborate with community leaders to mobilise resources, and ensure proper documentation and banking of funds. Similarly, Ahmad (2011) highlighted the importance of SMCs in liaising with community stakeholders and managing financial resources transparently. Mansuri and Rao (2013) also emphasised the role of community participation in project design and implementation, including financial management aspects.

These studies collectively underscore the significance of SMCs in economic governance and the necessity of clear guidelines and procedures for the effective utilisation of resources in educational settings. Lack of or inadequate training of the SMCs is cause for concern because it means that the SMCs input wrong practices into the school system. As the Open Systems Theory posits, poor or negative input may translate into poor or negative output, making the quality of education offered suspect.

4.2.2 Promotion of Overall School Performance

The second set of roles relates to promoting overall school performance. The study found that all SMC members interviewed know that they must ensure that the schools have teaching, learning, and assessment resources; construct and maintain school infrastructure; award best-performing teachers and learners; and promote teacher welfare, such as providing suitable accommodation. As one teacher at school, C put it:

“Usually, when called upon to contribute either funds or resources for maintenance or construction, the SMC is very active to the extent that we have a brick kiln as we speak for such purposes.”

However, none of the respondents knew they had to monitor the administration of standardised tests. As affirmed in a focus group discussion at school B:

“A Komiti oyendetsa sukulu mu masukulu onse atatu amayesetsa kupititsa patsogolo maphunziro mu masukulu mwawo. Amatha kusunghetsa ndalama komanso kutengapo gawo pa chitukuko cha mu masukulu mwawo. Moti pafupifupi nyumba zambiri za aziphunzitsi zinamangidwa kudzera ku ukatakwe wa ma komiti. Komano, samatengapo mbali ina yili yonse pankhani yoonelera mayeso omwe amalembedwa ndi mwana wina

aliyense mu boma lino. Amatenga nawo mbali nthawi youlutsa zosathira za mayeso amenewa”

Translation:

“Almost all the SMCs in the three schools actively promote overall school performance. They can contribute time and money to the development of the schools. Almost all the teacher houses were built through the initiatives of the SMCs. However, they do not participate in monitoring standardised tests. They are active only during the dissemination of results.”

This clearly shows that the SMCs are active in their traditional roles and hesitant, unwilling, or unaware of some nontraditional roles, such as monitoring tests. According to the Open Systems Theory guiding this study, this may lead to poor outcomes as their input is incomplete.

4.2.3 Promotion of Advocacy

Another role is the role aimed at the promotion of advocacy. In this regard, all members of the SMCs know that it is their role to reinforce school rules and regulations and to establish and reinforce by-laws on harmful cultural practices that hinder learners from attending school. Unfortunately, it was observed that even those who are supposed to explain the policies to the SMCs who are Headteachers were unaware of some of these programs as Headteacher from school C expounds:

“I have never heard about Complementary-Based Education, and I do not think any SMC member has ever heard of it. As for some of the roles, such as enforcing adherence to the legal school entry age, the Committee is aware and active, as this is a must since they are supposed to be there when we register new pupils.”

If the whole headteacher was unaware of such a role, the chances of SMC members being aware would be marginal.

They were also generally unaware that they were supposed to advocate for establishing Early Child Development (ECD) centres within the school proximity because they believed that community-based organisations or Churches usually run these centres. These gaps in the input mean there will be gaps in the output. A child attending ECD classes will be more ready to

start Standard One because they would have learnt most of the basics, such as shapes or colours, unlike one coming straight from home.

They were however aware and very active in reinforcing adherence to the legal school entry age of 6 years. However, none of the respondents knew they also had other roles, such as conducting awareness campaigns on key education policies such as the Readmission Policy, National Educational Standards, National Girls Education Strategy, National Education Sector Investment Plan and National Inclusive Education Strategy. They had never heard of Complimentary Based Education, a government-run program through the ministry responsible for Education to provide basic education opportunities to out-of-school children and youth targeting most disadvantaged communities. They were unaware that they had the mandate to advocate for its establishment.

4.2.4 Promotion of a Conducive Environment for Effective Curriculum Implementation

The study also found out that all members of the SMCs knew all the roles that fall under creating a conducive environment for effective curriculum implementation at the school level. These include monitoring teachers' and learners' attendance and punctuality, facilitating a safe and conducive school environment, allocating adequate resources for teaching and learning, and assessing and reinforcing positive discipline for teachers and learners. As described by a teacher at school B:

“Almost all the SMCs at this school are aware that they are supposed to assist in creating a conducive environment, but they lack either financial resources, such as when resources are needed to be allocated for teaching and learning, or the know-how to assess and reinforce positive discipline for teachers and learners.”

This shows that they are aware of the activities they are supposed to implement but seem to lack the resources and time to provide meaningful input into the system.

4.2.5 Support to School Programs

On the other hand, the study found that the SMC members' knowledge of their roles in supporting school programmes is mixed. They all know that they must mobilise resources for recreation and sporting activities, champion all Ministry of Education reforms, implement recommendations by Quality Assurance Officers to improve identified weaknesses and

mobilise resources for the School Meals Programmes. They also know they have a role in appointing, approving resignations, dismissing support staff, and constructing cost-effective school infrastructure and other school development activities. However, they knew nothing about mobilising resources for the National Reading Program (NRP) and National Numeracy Program (NNP). As opined by an SMC member at School C:

“Ndakhala ndikuona mdzukulu wanga wachinyamata amene amaphunzira pa sukulu pano, kubwera kunyumba ndi mabukhu omwe amatipempha kuti tizimuthandiza ndi ntchito yomwe aphunzitsi amamupasa kuti azapangile kunyumba. Ndiyesa zimenezi ndizokhudza ma pulogalamu a NRP olo NNP amene mwatchulawo, ngakhale ife timangoona ngati kuti basi ndizokhuza sukulu zomwe amachita tsiku ndi tsiku.”

Translation:

“I have seen my grandson, a student at this school, coming home with some books that we are supposed to be helping him with his homework. Apparently, this has something to do with one of the programs, either NRP or NNP, as you mentioned, but mostly, we assume that it has to do with their normal school work.”

Furthermore, the SMCs did not realise that they have a role of sensitising parents to allow their children to participate in core and extracurricular activities actively, advising the Ministry responsible on the time at which the school session shall begin and end on any day in adherence to recommended school day number of periods, and advising the Ministry on the provision of religious instruction to an agreed syllabus. As another SMC member at School C pointed out:

“Si udindo wa boma umenewo woyika nthawi yoti ana ayambe ndi kusiliza kuphunzira pa sukulu?”

Translation:

“Is it not the duty of the Government to set a time for when school sessions begin and end?”

This clearly shows that SMCs had no idea of some of their roles. As the Open Systems Theory points out, the chances of getting good education outcomes at such a school are dire because of the duty-bearers (SMC) lack of knowledge.

4.2.6 Promotion of Child Protection, Health and Safety of Learners and Teachers

Concerning the promotion of child protection, health, and safety of learners and teachers, all members of the SMCs know that they have to lead and manage the School Meals Programme and ensure that there are Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities at the school. As commented in one of the focus group discussion sessions at school C:

“Tinaphunzira kwambiri za maudindo athu, makamaka zokhuzana ndi umoyo wa ukhondo komanso kuteteza ophunzira, nthawi imene kunali mulili wa chimfene cha COVID. Izi zinali chonchi chifukwa choti Boma linatulutsa ndondomeko zomwe zinapangisa zinthu monga kusamba m’manja ndi njira zina zopewera matenda kukhala zoti wina aliyense adzisatila, chomwe chinatipangisa kuti nafe titengepo gawo.”

Translation:

“We learnt a lot about our roles, especially the health and safety of learners, during the COVID-19 period because the Government even produced guidelines that made hand washing and other sanitary measures mandatory, which forced us to get involved.”

However, they needed to understand that it is their role to facilitate the orientation of learners on personal hygiene. On the same note, while they know that they are supposed to be involved in identifying vulnerable children and providing them with recommended support, they needed to know that they should monitor the provision of guidance and counsel to learners. The study also found that the members of the SMCs know that they should be involved in setting up a functional grievance redress mechanism, making referrals, and providing timely responses to violence to resolve school-based GBV in liaison with school management. However, they do not know that they are also supposed to conduct awareness campaigns against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and other related gender issues, child protection, health and safety of learners and the health and safety of learners and teachers.

4.2.7 Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs

Other roles of SMCs relate to supporting learners with diverse needs. However, data revealed that none of the respondents knew the roles within the Guidelines for Formation and

Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) pertaining to these. The roles include lobbying for the deployment of specialist teachers; establishing and maintaining a disability-friendly environment in the school; mobilising financial and material resources; allocating a resource room for remedial support services; sourcing and distributing adequate assistive devices, teaching, learning and assessment resources. Others include monitoring teaching, learning and assessment; facilitating school-based assessment and identification; advocating for safe and accessible (WASH) facilities; and mainstreaming inclusive education needs in the school improvement plans. As one SMC member in school B reflected:

“Chomwe ndimadziwa ine ndichakuti kuli masukulu apadera omwe ophunzira amene ali ndi ulumali wosiyansiyana amapita kukaphunzira. Mwachitsanzo, ndikudziwa kuti kuli sukulu ya ana osaona ku Karonga komonso pali ina ya osatha kulankhula ndi kumva; sindikudziwa koma ndinayamba ndamvaponso za sukulu ina ku Ekwendeni ngakhale sindidziwa kuti amphunzilako chani. Sindimadziwa kuti sukulu yathu imayeneranso kuthandiza ophunzira oterewo.”

Translation:

“What I know is that there are specialist schools for learners with such needs. For example, I know there is one for blind students in Karonga and another for the deaf; I am unsure about Ekwendeni. I did not know that our school is supposed to be responsible for supporting such learners.”

This supports the findings that the parents have sketchy knowledge about these roles. On top of these, there are other roles, including monitoring the provision of guidance and counselling and conducting awareness campaigns to encourage parents to allow children with diverse backgrounds to attend school and address stigma and discrimination, which they do not actually get involved in. This means that equity is not achieved.

4.2.8 Promotion of a Resilient School Environment

As mentioned above, data has revealed that none of the SMC members know their role in promoting a resilient school environment. These roles include mainstreaming disaster risk management (DRM) in School Improvement Plans (SIP), developing school-based multi-hazard contingency plans, conducting periodic multi-hazard risk assessments and mapping, and

conducting awareness campaigns regarding disaster risks. As outlined by the SMC Chair at school B:

“Ife tilibe kuthekera kopanga zintchito zimenezo ngakhale zina zomwe mwatchulazo tinazimvapo kuzera maphunzilo omwe takhala tikupanga okhuzana ndi udindo wathu woyendesa sukulu. Ophunzira ndi amene nthawi zambiri amasamalira malo a sukulu.”

Translation:

“We do not have the know-how to conduct such activities, though I have heard about it from some of the training we have had. The pupils are usually the ones responsible for the school environment.”

Others include establishing and preserving productive school environments such as orchards, vegetable gardens, rainwater harvesting facilities, woodlots and pathways; lobbying and providing material and psychosocial support to affected learners and teachers. The fact that they were unaware of such roles in this day and age of climate change-related disasters should be alarming. No area is safe from such disasters, so SMCs need to learn about disaster risk management and develop school-based multi-hazard contingency plans for such a time when disaster may strike. They need to be in a position to provide material and psychosocial support to learners and teachers. This cannot be overemphasised since schools are where even community camps are located during disasters.

4.2.9 Sustainability of Programs and Interventions

The last set of roles is to achieve sustainability of programs and interventions. The study found that most SMC members know the roles associated with this. These include sensitising and persuading community members to participate in school development initiatives and maintenance of school infrastructure, even though they do not know what Building Back Better Principles, as recommended in the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022), are. Other roles that they know of are constructing and allocating cost-effective teachers' accommodation. As one teacher at school B commented:

“Most of the infrastructure you see here is built and maintained by the community because of the SMC. We have not talked with the school's alumni to assist us, though

occasionally, you notice a former pupil painting a classroom block or maintaining furniture of their own volition.”

They were unaware of facilitating Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) for school improvement and collaborating and coordinating partnerships with alumni for school development initiatives. They stated that they could receive such help, but they needed to learn that it was their role to initiate that.

4.2.10 Discussion of the findings

The findings above clearly show that the SMCs were largely unaware of their roles. Out of the nine roles stipulated in the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) they only were aware of four. This means that they obviously would not be effective in discharging their roles. For example, they were unaware that they were supposed to be promoting adherence to financial and procurement procedures. Under this role, the SMC ensures that all financial management procedures and processes are strictly followed. If the SMCs are unaware of financial and procurement procedures at the school chances are very high that the finances at the school will be abused, which will then affect the quality of education within the school.

It has also been observed that even for the roles they were aware of it was mostly because they have been traditionally implementing them and had seen their predecessors and neighbouring schools doing the same. In some cases, they could get trained by an NGO which was implementing a specific program at the school. They had never seen a copy nor heard of the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) as such they were unaware of its contents. This means that the schools are not getting the best output.

The theoretical framework (Open Systems Theory) guiding this study affirms that the external environment determines the organisation's survival (Thien & Razak, 2015). As such, if the external environment is unaware of the expected input type, the organisation cannot survive because it will have sketchy inputs. The outputs, which are the attainment of the school's goals, are determined by the inputs. As already pointed out, although the kinds of outputs vary with specific schools, they usually include one or more of the following: student and teacher growth and achievement levels, student dropout rates, student attendance rates, improved promotion

rates, improved school environment, school-community relations, and availability of teaching and learning materials. SMCs are an integral part of the external environment, as such, it is imperative that they are trained and become aware of their roles if the schools are to improve their quality.

While indicating a need for improvement, the findings above highlight the potential for growth and learning among SMC members. This resonates with what was found by other studies such as Teddy (2019), Mugabe (2019), Priyadarshinee and Gowramma (2018), Tieng'o (2018), and Sethi and Muddgal (2017). These studies also found mixed levels of knowledge among SMCs. More importantly, while others, such as Teddy (2019), found that the SMCs know their roles. The rest saw that members of SMCs do not know the roles or they know just some of them, with others lacking such knowledge. This underscores the importance of expanding efforts to equip the members of the SMCs so that they are knowledgeable in their roles and responsibilities through training. The effectiveness of their work and eventual contribution to the quality of primary education hinges on such knowledge. Furthermore, the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) are more comprehensive as they include new roles and responsibilities that have not traditionally been the domain of SMCs.

4.3 Effectiveness of the SMCs in Carrying Out Their Roles

Knowledge alone about roles and responsibilities is not an end in itself and is redundant if such roles and responsibilities are not effectively implemented. As such, the study wanted to assess the extent to which the SMCs are effective in carrying out their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, (Ministry of Education, 2022) because it is out of such effective implementation that they can contribute towards the quality of primary education in their schools and communities. As the Open Systems Theory posits, if the inputs are not effective, the implementation will not be effective thus compromising the quality of primary education offered.

4.3.1 Promotion of Adherence to Financial and Procurement Procedures

The first set of roles of the SMCs is the promotion of adherence to financial and procurement procedures, whereby the SMC ensures that all financial management procedures and processes are strictly followed. In this regard, the SMCs have been effective in some of the roles they have to play, while they have yet to be effective in others. To start with, the study found that the SMCs develop school improvement plans and budgets based on priority areas. The schools also bank their money, mainly the school improvement grants, directly deposited in their bank accounts. As for the other funds generated locally, these are not banked. On the other hand, the guidelines stipulate that the SMCs should check that no funds are kept in the office or at home. The SMCs know about this fact. However, all SMCs waive this condition, considering the distance from the school to the banks. In other instances, funds are transferred to phones; however, this is a last resort when some funds are needed urgently because this is seen by all SMCs as porous. As such, it is only used as a last resort for limited funds. Often, the funds are withdrawn in bulk and kept at the school for day-to-day expenditures. As explained in a focus group discussion at school B:

“Banki iikutali ku tawuni. Thiransipoti ndiyambili kwabasi. Sono nthawi zina timatapilatu ndalama zonse zomwe tizagwilise nchito kwakanthawi. Izi timachita kuchepesa ndalama zomwe tingaononge kuti zisachuluke.”

Translation:

“The bank is far. The transport cost is a lot. So sometimes we withdraw money, which we will use for some time to cut costs.”

Similarly, SMC member from school A further illustrated,

“Nthawi zina, ngati tafuna ndalama zansangansanga timatumiza ndalama ku Mpamba olo Airtel Money kuchokera ku banki. Mtengo umakhalapo ndi wochosela ndalama basi zomwe zimatchipa kuposa kupita konko ku banki. Komanso chifukwa choti timazifuna ndalamazo mwansangansanga timapanga pa ndalama zing’onozin’ono zokha.”

Translation:

“Sometimes, when we need money urgently, we send the money to Mpamba or Airtel Money (mobile money transfer). The only cost is withdrawal fees. Nevertheless, these

fees are lower than transport. Also, because we need that money urgently, we do this for small amounts [of money] only.”

These findings are similar to those of Mugabe (2019) in Uganda, which found that SMCs were effective in approving school development plans and budgets and monitoring the use of school funds.

The Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, (Ministry of Education, 2022), also require that SMCs get approval from the District Education Office through the PEA for any planned expenditure. This system of getting approval from the DEM through the PEA is ideal for checks and balances. However, in practice, this has only been done with school improvement grants and for significant expenditures such as construction as the schools develop the budgets, which are then approved. On the other hand, seeking approval is not done with locally generated funds. Thus, this condition is not adhered to. The primary reason that the respondents gave is that it may lead to delays as the public service system is slow. As such, the schools often bypass the DEM. Furthermore, many of the members of the SMCs said that they are not aware of this condition besides the SIGs. Everything is done at the school level once they get locally mobilised resources such as school development funds.

Another area in which the SMCs could have been more compelling is the identification of suppliers through the procurement committee. This has only been effective regarding school infrastructure development, such as hiring builders or carpenters. However, for other issues, such as procurement of teaching and learning resources, the SMCs stated that having a procurement committee ask for bids or a prequalified supplier is impractical. This is because these schools are in rural areas, and their procurement budgets are too small to advertise and get bids from suppliers. What they do is that the head teacher or a delegated teacher purchases these within Chitipa, or Karonga and Mzuzu based on the kind of goods. However, there is laxity as the SMC members are often not part of the purchase teams. For instance, in a focus group discussion at school C it was highlighted that:

“A Hedi amapita ku Boma (Chitipa) olo ku Karonga kukagula mabuku ndi ma bolopeni. Tonse sizingatheke kuti tipite. Aphunzitsi ndi amene angadziwe bwino zofunikira. Ife kwathu nkuona ngati zinthuzo zili momwe zikuyenera kukhalira komanso ngati ma lisiti akatunduyo alipo.”

Translation:

“The headteacher goes to Chitipa Boma or Karonga to buy books and pens. All of us cannot go. It is the teachers who know what they want. We check the things and receipts.”

Noteworthy, all SMCs are active in checking procured materials. However, many of these have to do with construction materials. On the other hand, there is laxity regarding teaching and learning resources. Many members of the SMCs said that they check with the head teachers to see if things have been bought, but there needs to be a physical inspection of the teaching and learning materials bought. Furthermore, many said that they do not check that all procured materials are recorded in the store's ledger and ensure that they are recorded at all times as demanded by the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, (Ministry of Education, 2022).

From what has been stated above, it can be said that the effectiveness of SMCs in the promotion of adherence to financial and procurement procedures, whereby the SMC ensures that all financial management procedures and processes are strictly followed, have been effective in some of the roles they have to play. In contrast, they have yet to be effective in others. According to our guiding theoretical framework, this has some implications for the output. The quality of the output will be different from when the SMC ensures that all financial procedures and processes are followed. When these procedures are not followed, the resources meant for the improvement of the teaching and learning at the school will be pilfered, leading to substandard education services.

4.3.2 Promotion of Overall School Performance

The SMCs are also mandated to contribute towards the promotion of overall school performance. All SMC members interviewed stated that they know this is their central role, as the whole objective of the education undertaking is to ensure that their schools perform well. However, the effectiveness of the SMCs in this regard has been mixed. First, SMCs effectively motivate teachers and learners to perform well. This was seen in that all SMCs interviewed indicated that they award best-performing teachers and learners. Most of the teachers interviewed claimed this motivates them to maintain or surpass such performance and motivate others to improve.

“Timagula mphatso za ophunzira amene akhonza bwino makamaka amene akhala nambala wani, thuu ndi fili. Timawagulilanso mphatso aphunzitsi amene akhonzetsa bwino ophunzira awo. Ngati ophunzira ambiri asankhidwa kuti apite ku sekondale timapangisa ka phwando kosangalala ndi aphunzitsi.”

Translation:

“We buy gifts for learners in positions 1, 2, and 3. We also buy gifts for teachers whose learners pass well. If many learners get selected [to secondary school], we have a small party for teachers.”

Focus Group Discussion at school C.

Headteacher School A also concurred with the sentiments above,

“When we give gifts to learners, they will want to pass well next term to get a gift. Other learners will also try to pass well to get a gift. It is not just about the gift. Public recognition motivates them to work hard as they get gifts from teachers, learners, and parents.”

Further to the above, the SMCs have actively ensured that teaching, learning and assessment resources are available. This role has been made much easier with the school improvement grants and other locally mobilised resources such as learners’ contributions. However, all respondents stated that they have not been fully effective in this regard due to the limited funds available to meet the overwhelming needs. On the other hand, all members of the SMCs indicated that they are not involved in monitoring the administration of standardised tests, as they are not aware that it is their role, even though this is a requirement according to the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). They said all they knew was that this was the duty of the teachers and not them.

Further to the above, the SMCs have not been effective in constructing and maintaining school infrastructure, including providing suitable accommodation for teachers to promote teacher welfare. This is even though all respondents stated that they recognise this as their core role; more importantly, this has been one of the traditional roles of SMCs. Furthermore, these roles have become paramount because of the introduction of free primary education, which has led

to increased enrollment, which has increased further through advocacy on education by different stakeholders. This, in turn, has led to an increment of teachers deployed to these schools. All these have led to a shortage of classrooms, toilets and teachers' accommodation. The situation of teachers' accommodation is compounded by these schools being in rural areas where private property development of suitable quality accommodation for rent is poor.

However, as they are aware of this and wish to have enough school infrastructure, including accommodation for their teachers, as part of ensuring their welfare, their ability to do so is significantly compromised due to resource constraints. This is because of limited financial support from government and development partners. On the other hand, the SMCs' capacity is limited in local resource mobilisation as these infrastructural projects are costly, considering the poverty levels in the local communities. As the SMC chair for School C elaborated;

“Makolo ambiri amene amatumiza ana awo ku sukulu ino ndi osauka oti amangodalira kulima; kotelo kuyembekezera kuti atha kukwanitsa kusungha ndalama zothandizira kuyendetsa sukulu ndizosatekha. Nthawi zambiri amatha kugwila nawo ntchito za chitukukozo.”

Translation:

“Most of the parents who send their children to this school are poor and live from one harvest to the next; as such, it would be unrealistic to ask them to contribute money towards activities at the school. Usually, they will give their time.”

Furthermore, continuous demand by the SMCs for contributions from the community members would make primary education very expensive, resulting in some children failing to attend school, thus defeating the whole objective of free primary education, which is to increase access. All respondents also complained that this is affecting the quality of education as classrooms are overcrowded, other learners learn in the open, and WASH facilities are inadequate, affecting their ability to attract and retain teachers. These findings are similar to those of Geoffrey (2013) in Tanzania, who found that school committees' roles in mobilising school resources were minimal. As a result, schools still lacked resources, which means that output, which is students' performance, might not be achieved.

4.3.3 Promotion of Advocacy

Regarding the promotion of advocacy, the SMCs have effectively reinforced school rules and regulations and established and reinforced by-laws on harmful cultural practices that hinder learners from attending school. The schools and community members have established rules, regulations, and by-laws that guide learners, teachers, and community members. In this regard, the SMCs have ensured that all concerned parties adhere to these rules. In case of such laws and regulations infringement, the SMCs, school administrators and community leaders, whichever the case is applicable, have worked to resolve those issues to ensure that they do not affect education. These findings resonate with Teddy (2019) in a study done in Tanzania, who found that SMCs played a significant role in maintaining good student behaviour and discipline for improving student's academic performance.

However, the SMCs have not been effective in taking any action concerning awareness campaigns on crucial education policies such as the Readmission Policy, National Educational Standards, National Girls Education Strategy, National Education Sector Investment Plan and National Inclusive Education Strategy, advocating for the establishment of Complementary Basic Education (CBE) and establishment of Early Child Development (ECD) centres within the school proximity; and establishment of by-laws with Councils and reinforcing of by-laws for their schools. This is because all of them stated that they are not aware that these are their roles. As a teacher at School A observed:

“Only one or two SMC members can understand the NES (National Education Standards) or the NESIP (National Education Sector Investment Plan). Moreover, this is because they are retired teachers. As for the rest, they can hardly comprehend these documents, so you cannot expect them to conduct awareness campaigns.”

This has been compounded by the fact that the expanded new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, Ministry of Education (2022) have yet to be publicised among them. Note should be taken that the SMCs have been very successful in reinforcing adherence to the legal school entry age of 6 years, which is because the teachers mostly prompt them since it is a requirement that they be available.

4.3.4 Creation of a Conducive Environment for Effective Curriculum Implementation at the School Level

Effective curriculum implementation in schools is directly linked to the quality of primary education and the outcomes thereof. On the same note, this depends on creating a conducive environment within schools for effective curriculum implementation. In this regard, all the SMCs have effectively facilitated a safe and conducive environment within schools. They have worked with community members and leadership to ensure that school environments and communities are free from threats, including physical ones, which may affect schooling in any way. On the same note, they have worked with the school management and parents to reinforce positive discipline for teachers and learners. These include counselling or disciplining those who misbehave.

Further to the above, attendance and punctuality by both teachers and learners are also important in contributing towards quality in primary education and eventual outcomes. As mentioned above, all members of the SMCs interviewed know about this. However, they have yet to be very active or effective in practice. First, the SMCs have not been effective in checking the attendance of teachers. This is because they do not have a system for checking teacher class attendance, such as a teacher register kept by learners, which is given or accessible by the SMCs. On the same note, learners do not report teacher attendance and absenteeism. This is so because they are afraid of repercussions from the teachers. Furthermore, the learners do not exhibit the agency to report as they are not sure they are supposed to report teacher attendance because there has never been a system for such reporting.

“We cannot report a teacher if they are absent because the teacher will hate you and make your life difficult.” Chairman SMC School B.

On the other hand, the head teachers do not report teacher attendance to the SMCs because they feel it is an administrative issue they should handle or report to the PEA if they fail to solve it. Sometimes, they think such reporting to SMCs may create a rift or animosity with their teachers. Furthermore, they assume that it may be construed as a failure in carrying out their role as school administrators. In this case, the SMCs have only been active in outstanding cases, such as when teachers have been observed drinking, or they are drunk during school time. As clarified by the Headteacher of school C:

“That is an issue we handle as head teachers at the school. We cannot be reporting to the school [management] committee. Unless it gets worse and we report to the DEM, we inform the school [management] committee so that they should be witnesses during a disciplinary hearing.”

Similarly, a School Management Committee member in School C said that:

“A Hedi ndi amene amapanga za disiplini ya aphunzisi. Ife timalowelapo pokhapokha zikakhala zazikulu monga kumwa mowa nthawi ya nchito ndi kuthawa ku nchito.”

Translation:

“The head does that [disciplining teachers]. We only come in when it is serious, like drinking beer and failing to teach.”

On the same note, the SMCs have also not been active nor effective in monitoring learner attendance and punctuality. What has been happening is that teachers and other learners only report such cases if they are outstanding cases, such as child marriage. However, in practice, this is often reported to the mothers’ group and not to the SMCs directly. In such a scenario, the cases rarely reach the SMCs as there is no official position that the mothers’ groups should be reporting to or informing the SMCs about such cases. In some cases, the hands of the SMCs are tied. For instance, absenteeism may be due to financial reasons. This is because the SMCs do not have the means to help. Even though the Promotion of Child Protection, Health and Safety of Learners and Teachers guidelines mandate the SMCs to identify vulnerable children and provide them with recommended support. In practice, this is becoming difficult because the SMCs, the schools, and the community do not have a dedicated social welfare fund that could be used in this regard. As summed up by an SMC member at School C:

“Ana ena amachokera mumakomo osauka, ndiye amalephera kubwera ku sukulu chifukwa chosadya, alibe chovala or sanakwanise kusunzika ndalama ya chitukuko. Palibe chomwe tingate kuchita. Tilibe ndalama.”

Translation:

“Some children come from poor homes, so they fail to come to school because they have not eaten, they do not have clothes, or they have not paid. So what can we do? We do not have money.”

Secondly, because the majority of the community members are poor and need help to make ends meet, it becomes difficult to mobilise resources from other community members which could be used to support such vulnerable children, as these are equally constrained. Similarly, this becomes difficult when the learners fail to attend school because they need to pay school-level contributions. It must be mentioned that despite primary schools in government-owned or assisted schools being free, learners are required to pay a myriad of contributions, including development funds, any other funds that may be requested for specific undertakings, and examination funds used for printing examination papers. The hands of the SMCs become tied in this regard because they are the ones who make or approve such decisions. The possibility of giving a waiver is also a challenge, as it may lead to a backlash from other community members.

4.3.5 Support to School Programs

The SMCs have effectively led, managed and mobilised resources for the School Meals Programs. They have been able to mobilise and manage volunteers and get small contributions from community members to fund the exercise, including logistics and the acquisition of utensils. The members of the SMCs, as well as teachers and community members, stated that this has led to a reduction in absenteeism. However, they have also observed some improvement in class participation among learners. This intervention is essential mainly during lean periods when household food supplies become low, affecting learners' attendance and performance.

“The school committee get contributions from parents to buy firewood, cups and pots. It also buys sugar for the porridge. Some children come to school without eating anything, so this porridge is important because when they eat, they are active and pay attention in class. Since we started giving [learners] porridge, many come to school because they know they will eat.” Teacher at school B.

They have also been effective in setting up a functional grievance redress mechanism. Learners have been encouraged to report any problems, whether within the school or at home. Teachers

have also been encouraged to be approachable so that learners should be free to report their challenges. Furthermore, they have been active in solving such issues to resolve before they get out of hand and affect the education enterprise. Moreover, they have also set systems, including the mother groups, to provide such services and act as a recipient of grievances from learners. Teachers have also been encouraged to report to any member of the SMCs if they have any grievances that they feel the SMCs can take up, and the SMCs have indeed been active in attending to and resolving such grievances.

The SMCs and community leaders have also effectively sensitised and persuaded community members to participate in school development initiatives, including maintaining school infrastructure. In this regard, they have managed to mobilise local resources such as labour, sand, bricks and the like. However, the mobilisation of financial resources has been problematic. This is so as the SMCs and the school administration have a limit on what they can mobilise locally in terms of finances, mainly considering the economic situation of the community members. Secondly, assuming that primary education is free, extensive demands may defeat the objective of free primary education as it may affect access issues. This is compounded by the fact that school improvement grants are insufficient to fund the school improvement plans budgets. Another area they have had challenges is identifying vulnerable children and providing them with recommended support. Due to limitations and challenges in financial resources, the members of the SMCs interviewed highlighted that they have not been very effective in this regard. Even though they have made some efforts, such as providing uniforms and other school supplies, their reach has been small compared to needs. However, they have taken the initiative to refer to and link some learners with partners such as the Social Welfare Department, other community-based organisations (CBOs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for possible inclusion in their programmes.

4.3.6 Promotion of Child Protection, Health and Safety of Learners and Teachers

Concerning the promotion of child protection, health, and safety of learners and teachers, all members of the SMCs know that they have to lead and manage the School Meals Programme but were unable to do so because of a lack of resources. At one of the schools, a structure was even built to facilitate this, which has now been turned into a classroom.

Headteacher School B remarked:

“A certain organisation built the building and gave us the resources to feed the pupils, but since they pulled out, we have been unable to continue because we lack inputs such as fertiliser to grow foodstuffs.”

In this case, the SMC was aware of the roles but could not discharge them due to a lack of resources. The SMC was also able to ensure that there are Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities at the school. This was apparently taken seriously during the COVID-19 period as the Ministry of Education made these measures mandatory. However, they did not facilitate the orientation of learners on personal hygiene. On the same note, while they know that they are supposed to be involved in identifying vulnerable children and providing them with recommended support, they were unable to monitor the provision of guidance and counselling to learners because they thought this was supposed to be done by teachers at the school and individual parents at home. The study also found that the members of the SMCs know that they should be involved in setting up a functional grievance redress mechanism, making referrals, and providing timely responses to violence to resolve school-based GBV in liaison with school management. However, they were unable to conduct awareness campaigns against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and other related gender issues, child protection, health and safety of learners and the health and safety of learners and teachers because of a lack of knowledge, as they thought this was the duty of the community outreach officers from the various government departments.

4.3.7 Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs

Data revealed that none of the respondents knew the roles within the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022), pertaining to these. As such, they were unable to discharge them. The roles include lobbying for the deployment of specialist teachers; establishing and maintaining a disability-friendly environment in the school; mobilising financial and material resources; allocating a resource room for remedial support services; sourcing and distributing adequate assistive devices, teaching, learning and assessment resources, monitoring teaching, learning and assessment; facilitating school-based assessment and identification; advocating for safe and accessible (WASH) facilities; and mainstreaming inclusive education needs in the school improvement plans.

As stated by participants in a focus group discussion at School A:

“All we know is that children with diverse needs are supposed to go to specialist schools in Karonga or Mzimba.”

This supports the findings that the parents have sketchy knowledge about some roles and are unable to discharge them.

4.3.8 Promotion of a Resilient School Environment

As mentioned above, none of the SMC members knew their role in promoting a resilient school environment, which means they could not discharge it. Their understanding was that pupils were supposed to be responsible for establishing and preserving productive school environments such as orchards, vegetable gardens, rainwater harvesting facilities, woodlots, and pathways.

4.3.9 Sustainability of Programmes and Interventions

The last set of roles is to achieve sustainability of programmes and interventions, and most SMC members know the associated roles. These include sensitising and persuading community members to participate in school development initiatives and maintenance of school infrastructure, even though they do not know what Building Back Better Principles, as recommended in the guide, are. Other roles that they know of are constructing and allocating cost-effective teachers' accommodation. This is one role they played very well because, in almost all the schools, the SMC built and maintained the infrastructure even though two of them were owned by churches whose role was to do this.

As asserted below by one SMC member at School B:

“Timadziwa kuti udindo womanga ndi kukonza nyumba ndi udindo wa eni ake a mpingo. Kunena mosabisa mawu, a mpingo palibe chomwe amapangapo, ndiye poti anawa ndi athu tingatani koma basi kupitiliza kupanga toka.”

Translation:

“We know the duty of building and maintaining infrastructure was the owners' responsibility, which is the church. Unfortunately, the church has done nothing, and since these are our children, we continue with it.”

However, they fail to sustain some of the programs, such as the School Meals Programme, because of a lack of resources.

4.3.10. Discussion of the findings

On knowledge of SMCs about their role, the study found that there are some roles that the members of the SMCs do not know that they fall within their mandate. More importantly, these are part of the expanded portfolio of roles within the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) which were not there then. As a result, the SMCs have not been effective because they do not know what they are supposed to be doing. How are they supposed to implement something they are not aware of? This information gap is affecting their effectiveness and, in turn, their contribution towards the quality of primary education as these roles also contribute towards it. The study found that out of the nine roles they were supposed to implement, they were effective in three, had mixed success with one and registered no effectiveness in four. The major reason is basically because they did not know those roles. As already observed in the findings on knowledge of the roles above, the SMCs were unaware of their roles making it difficult for them to implement them effectively. This in turn affected the quality of primary education in the schools.

As the Open Systems Theory dictates, there will be no practical outputs in this scenario without effective implementation. This makes it imperative to expand efforts to equip the members of the SMCs with knowledge of their roles and responsibilities, as the effectiveness of their work and eventual contribution to the quality of primary education hinge on such knowledge. Furthermore, the study illustrates how school committees engage in a transformative process within the school system. School Management Committees represent the throughput phase in the Open Systems Theory through their involvement in administrative tasks, decision-making processes, and collaboration with school administrators and teachers (Thien & Razak, 2012). This phase involves processing inputs internally to achieve organisational goals, which in this context include improving the quality of primary education and reflecting the attainment of school goals. These outputs are directly influenced by the contributions and actions of School Management Committees, highlighting their significant role in achieving desired outcomes as outlined in the Open Systems Theory (Thien & Razak, 2012).

In conclusion, the study observed that the SMCs have been effective in some roles, while their effectiveness in others has been low. Furthermore, information gaps about the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, (Ministry of Education, 2022), which have expanded roles, have affected their effectiveness as they cannot do what they do not know is their responsibility.

4.4 Challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles

The SMCs have also faced several challenges, affecting their effectiveness in carrying out their roles and contributing to the quality of primary education in their schools.

4.4.1 Lack of Training

What has come out clearly from this study is that although most SMCs would like to improve the quality of Education, what has been lacking is knowledge of how to go about it because of gaps in knowledge. This scenario has come about because of the lack of capacity building of the SMCs, which is critical to strengthening the SMCs' capabilities to carry out their roles effectively. This becomes even more pronounced as the current Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, Ministry of Education (2022) are new and more comprehensive, with new roles included. However, the study found that there is a lack of training among the SMC members. Very few members of the SMCs have ever been trained in their roles. The majority of the members are just oriented at best, even though, in many instances, they go with the flow while being expected to learn as they go. These findings are similar to a study done in India (Priyadarshinee & Gowramma, 2018), which found that the majority of the members of school management and development committees (SMDC) were not aware of their role and responsibilities in school management and that most members were not oriented about their roles and responsibilities; as a result, the members blindly followed others in performing their roles.

Much of the training done in this area has been through the efforts of NGOs as part of projects. This was done before the publication of the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) . Thus,

the worst part is that even those who are not trained have not been trained in the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). Even if such training is done, which is rare, not all members are trained; instead, just a few members are chosen to be trained. This is done so because of economic considerations or rather budget constraints. The NGOs find it affordable to train selected individuals from different schools at once, as their budgets may not enable them to train all SMC members at their school or combine different schools rather than train all SMC members. The assumption is that those trained will cascade such training to other members of the SMCs who were not trained. However, there is no follow-up on whether such cascading is happening. Furthermore, there is no quality control system to ensure that the cascaded information is of good quality, assuming such cascading occurs.

“The government does not fund such training. I heard that sometime back, an NGO—I have forgotten its name took some members [of SMC] for training. You see, it would be better if all of them were trained. However, the NGOs do not have money to train everyone. There are many schools, so they choose one from each school.”

Headteacher at School B.

This is also collaborated by an SMC Member at school C who said that,

“Amangosankhapo munthu m’modzi olo awiri kuti akachite maphunzilo. Ngakhale akabwerako saphunzisa anzawo. Zitha kukhala bwino atatiphunzisako anzawo zomwe aphunzirazo kuti nafe tidziwe.”

“They just chose one or two people to attend a workshop (training). Nevertheless, when they come, they do not train anyone. It would be better if they trained all of us,”

The head teachers cannot also do such training. As such, they may not be able to do them. All the head teachers and the PEA say that they are unaware of the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022), nor have they been briefed about them or trained in them. Besides, they do not have copies of the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) as they have not been widely distributed. On the other hand, even if they did have access to the Guidelines and were trained, it was noted that their willingness to train the SMCs cannot be guaranteed. On the same note, even if they conducted such training, there is no assurance that such training may be comprehensive as some issues may work against their interests, for instance, those related to

accountability. This has to be appreciated because some of the roles of the SMCs are to hold the head teachers and teachers accountable. These include financial and attendance, as well as teaching and learning. The most controversial aspect is the financial aspect, as some head teachers may not be enthusiastic about having a robust and comprehensive oversight over funds allocation and utilisation. Thus, they would not want to lose the grip that they currently have over funds management.

On the one hand, this may be because of wrong or sinister reasons, but on the other hand, this is fueled by the assumption that the SMCs may not or do not have enough capacity to make the right decisions regarding such fund utilisation. Furthermore, this is fueled by the fact that many community members, represented by the SMCs, tend to prioritise ‘hardware’ compared to ‘software’ expenditures. Thus, while the head teachers may have their priorities, which may be theirs or that they have discussed with their colleagues, they may assume that the SMCs may be unable to appreciate their veracity. These sentiments are similar to the findings of Beasley and Huillery (2017), studying the short-term impacts of grants to school committees in 1000 schools in Niger, who explicitly link their disappointing results to poor parent decision-making. In their experiment, parent-led school committees directed the new funds toward specific spending categories, like school infrastructure, and underinvested in teaching and learning. They conclude that parents may be “willing but unable” to make optimal management decisions for schools due to low capacity, such as a lack of time and expertise to increase the quality of education.

There is also no dedicated budget in schools for such training. On the other hand, community members are overwhelmed with contributions such as development funds and others, which are called for from time to time. The community members give such contributions because they are mainly for physical development; as such, they may be less willing to fund ‘soft’ interventions like capacity building of SMCs. Thus, while there have been reforms on how the SMCs are supposed to work, not much has changed in practice. The SMCs’ progression has been organic, which could be much appreciated in other situations. Nevertheless, in the present case, it has not done much to change how the system works, as, besides the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022), things are working as they used to be.

4.4.2 *Limited Sources of Information*

The SMCs lack sources of information. As such, they are susceptible to manipulation. They do not even have the current guidelines for their roles because they have not been widely disseminated or publicised. When shown a copy of the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022), the headteacher for school B remarked that:

“I have never seen nor heard of these new guidelines, and this is true for almost all the schools in the district because I would have known if any school had such guidelines because we are usually oriented when there is policy change.”

As such, some roles that must be pointed out are comprehensive and unknown. For instance, the promotion of a resilient school environment from natural and artificial disasters is a specialised area. There is mention of mainstreaming disaster risk management (DRM) in school improvement plans, developing school-based multi-hazard contingency plans, and conducting periodic multi-hazard risk assessments and mapping, all of which none of the SMC members interviewed know much about. All head teachers and PEA who were interviewed stated that they were not aware of the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools, Ministry of Education (2022). In this case, it is not easy to expect them to effectively train the SMCs even if they were willing to do so.

Furthermore, even if the Guidelines document was available, it was only in English and had no translation into local languages. Although SMC members are somewhat educated, having this publication in English is only a barrier to adequate comprehension. Ideally, each level of the education system, from the district through the Zone to the local schools and the SMCs, should have several copies in English and commonly comprehended local languages.

Several authors and studies have observed challenges related to the dissemination and accessibility of guidelines and policies within educational systems, similar to the issues faced in disseminating the new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). For example, research by Johnson et al. (2015) highlighted the difficulties in effectively communicating and disseminating educational policies to stakeholders, leading to gaps in understanding and implementation. Similarly, a study by Smith and Brown (2018) emphasised the importance of translating guidelines and policies into local languages to ensure comprehension and

implementation at the grassroots level. Additionally, findings from a report by UNESCO (2019) indicated that the lack of localised versions of educational materials and guidelines hindered effective implementation and compliance in various educational contexts.

Further, the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) have not been disseminated or publicised widely. As such, some roles that must be pointed out are comprehensive and unknown. For instance, the promotion of a resilient school environment from natural and artificial disasters is a specialised area. There is mention of mainstreaming disaster risk management (DRM) in school improvement plans, developing school-based multi-hazard contingency plans, and conducting periodic multi-hazard risk assessments and mapping, all of which none of the SMC members interviewed know much about. All head teachers and PEA who were interviewed stated that they were not aware of these Guidelines. In this case, it is not easy to expect them to effectively train the SMCs even if they were willing to do so.

Furthermore, even if the Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools document was available, it was only in English and had no translation into local languages. Although SMC members are somewhat educated, having this publication in English is only a barrier to adequate comprehension. Ideally, each level of the education system, from the district through the Zone to the local schools and the SMCs, should have several copies in English and commonly comprehended local languages.

4.4.3 Power and Influence

The study found that one of the challenges faced by the SMCs is the degree of power they wield, which influences what the School Management Committee can or cannot do. The effectiveness of the SMCs is directly linked to the degree of power devolved in them, which determines what they can or cannot do. Weak committees may serve in an advisory role, more vital committees may have more substantial monitoring responsibilities, and the most robust bodies may wield independent power over the school's financial, managerial, and operational decisions (Silberstein, 2023). In this regard, with narrow management powers, school committees often cannot change how parents or community members make claims about schools. In this study, almost all those in authority in all the schools showed little condescension in how they dealt with the SMC because of actual or perceived limitations about the SMCs capability. Although there was a positive relationship between members of SMC

and teachers, some education officials felt they were the decision-makers and the community had to follow or implement their decisions.

As Headteacher at school A put it:

“Most of the SMCs have little education, so sometimes we act and normalise the decisions during meetings with the chair’s consent because he is able to understand issues since he is a retired teacher.”

This could be because the SMC's low social, educational, and financial status relative to teachers severely constrains their voice. They only seemed to be having regular meetings and actions in areas of fundraising.

Another issue was mainly on financial accountability because some of the school heads did not engage them in school financial issues, and enquiring into such issues often raised tension between them and the school authorities. Thus, there was a lack of transparency in school finance, and the SMCs failed to perform their role of serving as checks and balances on the school administration to stop leakages in resource flow as they occurred. The observation was that much as they have the mandate to undertake some school duties and responsibilities, the power and authority to run schools still lies with the local and central government rather than at the school level. This seemed to be as already alluded to because the main levers of accountability, such as setting the school budget, making human resource decisions, selecting the curriculum, and monitoring outcomes, are primarily left outside school committees’ remit. Instead, the bureaucracy outsources specific managerial responsibilities to school committees that essentially have to do with inputs, such as fundraising for the school, spending a small discretionary budget, or monitoring teacher attendance. As a result, school committees are effectively absorbed into the “management” relationship and endowed with limited power that unenforceable any direct relationship of accountability between them and the school. As Rashid (2014) argues, simply granting “school governance” responsibilities to school committees is unlikely, in and of itself, to allow them to be effective unless they are backstopped by support from other parts of the system.

4.4.4 Lack of Administrative Skills

Related to the above, it has to be pointed out that the study found out that the SMC members are passionate about their work. Two broad factors influence this. Firstly, belonging to a

community leadership body such as an SMC gives it a sense of prestige and influence in the community. Furthermore, it boosts their ego based on the fact that the community entrusted them with that role. As such, this works as an intrinsic motivation, resulting in passion. Secondly, it is based on the fact that they know how vital their role is in the whole education setup, ultimately benefiting their children and community. However, passion and motivation alone are not enough in the absence of technical capacity to effectively carry out their role and fulfil their mandate. Many SMC members lack advanced education and administrative skills. As such, while they put much effort into their work, this lack of administrative skills affects the extent to which they can effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. The current practice of just briefing them on their roles is not enough if they lack the tools to carry out those roles. The Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022) outline those roles. However, it would have been great if the Ministry of Education had developed specific modules for the different roles. For example, financial management, etcetera. These should be more like ‘how to’ step-by-step guides.

4.4.5 Discussion of the Findings

The challenges faced by school committees, such as a lack of training, financial constraints, and limited dissemination of Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022), underscore the importance of feedback loops in the Open Systems Theory (Thien & Razak, 2012). Feedback from school committees, administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders is crucial for assessing effectiveness, making necessary improvements, and adapting to evolving circumstances within the educational system.

These challenges all seem to emanate from one another. The fact that there are limited sources of information for example means that even if training was provided, its value would be limited because the material used is obsolete since there are now new Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the School Management Committee in Primary Schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). In essence, the findings of the present study not only depict the essential role of School Management Committees in the educational ecosystem but also demonstrate how their functions and challenges align with the fundamental principles of the Open Systems Theory (Thien & Razak, 2012). This theoretical framework provides a lens through which we can

understand the dynamic interactions, processes of transformation, goal attainment, and adaptive mechanisms inherent in the functioning of school committees and their impact on primary education quality in Malawi. This will ensure that the school functions as a whole because the school functioning as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Everything in an environment is a complete system on its own. However, it is a unit or subsystem of yet a more extensive system, and all are interdependent. The same is true of the school system.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The study findings and discussion above have shown that while the SMC members know some of their roles, there are still significant gaps as regards other roles, which are equally important in contributing to improvement in the quality of primary education. Further, it has shown that such gaps in knowledge affect efficiency in carrying out their roles. The major gap identified so far is a lack of knowledge, which is a result of a lack of training to build the capacity of members of SMCs. This is compounded by the fact that the current SMC guidelines have not been publicised nor distributed widely in the first place. In addition, they are in English only, hence making them less accessible to the target audience (SMCs), who are mostly vernacular speakers. Apart from those mentioned above, these Guidelines also do not have specific modules for some specialised roles, such as disaster risk reduction or financial management. Lack of financial resources, both locally generated and from government and development partners, has also affected the extent to which the SMCs could effectively carry out their roles, mainly in infrastructure such as classrooms, WASH facilities, and teachers' accommodation. The next chapter provides a discussion of the significant findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Chapter Overview

This study examined the role of School Management Committees in ensuring the quality of primary education. The chapter provides a summary of the significant findings presented in chapter four. The discussion is based on the research objectives and the related literature review. The research objectives and research questions addressed three major themes, namely: assess the knowledge of SMCs on their roles in ensuring quality primary education; analyse the effectiveness of the SMCs in carrying out their roles; and lastly, examine the challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles.

5.2 Summary of Findings

5.2.1 Knowledge of SMCs on their Roles in Ensuring Quality Primary Education

The study found that the SMC member's knowledge is not comprehensive. This is because of a lack of capacity building as well as unavailability of the Guidelines on the Formation and Composition of SMCs in Primary Schools handbook (MoE, 2022) for the SMCs. They were aware of only four roles out of nine which were mostly the roles that they have been implementing all along. These four are the creation of a conducive environment for effective curriculum implementation at the school level, promotion of child protection, health and safety of learners and teachers, support to school programs and the promotion of overall school performance. However, they had superficial knowledge for the other roles such as supporting learners with diverse needs, promoting a resilient school environment, the promotion of adherence to financial and procurement procedures, promotion of advocacy and sustainability of programmes and interventions. Partial awareness meant partial implementation leading to partial achievement of quality primary education. This was seen in that the committees did a superb job in implementing the roles they were of as compared to the non-traditional roles.

Unavailability of literature to guide the SMCs was also a big problem. Even when the trainings had been done the unavailability of the relevant literature led to a superficial understanding, inconsistent quality and difficulty in evaluation. The study's identification of low knowledge levels among SMC members who did participate in training sessions underscores the importance of addressing this gap by making available the relevant literature. Anderson (2018) further suggests that training should not only focus on procedural aspects but also on fostering a deeper understanding of the educational landscape and the intricacies of committee roles. This can be achieved if the SMCs are trained with relevant and up to date literature.

The findings highlight the importance of targeted training and support to empower SMCs to effectively carry out their expanded roles. Addressing the knowledge gaps related to financial procedures and promoting active involvement in all aspects of school management, including monitoring student assessments, are crucial steps. On the other hand, fostering open communication and collaborative relationships between SMCs, teachers, and community members can enhance stakeholder perceptions and strengthen the overall effectiveness of SMCs in promoting quality primary education.

Ultimately, the success of SMCs in Malawi hinges on a multidimensional approach that combines clear policy guidelines, adequate resources, and ongoing support. Through addressing the challenges identified in this study and capitalizing on the existing strengths of SMCs, Malawi can further empower communities to play a meaningful role in improving the quality of primary education and ensuring a brighter future for its children

5.2.2 Effectiveness of the SMCs in Carrying out their Roles

The study found that the SMCs have been effective only in three traditional roles which were support to school programs, promotion of advocacy, sustainability of programmes and interventions. The study also found that they had some minor success with the role of creation of a conducive environment for effective curriculum implementation at the school level and had been not effective at all for the rest of the roles. This is understandable, as they cannot be effective in something they do not know falls under their mandate. However, their effectiveness has also been affected even in those roles they know. In some cases, they cannot carry out those roles effectively even though they know them and appreciate that they are critical in improving the quality of primary education. This has been caused mostly by their lack of knowledge because of lack of training as well as unavailability of relevant literature. As a result, as the Open Systems Theory posits, the schools cannot be effectively administered leading to poor educational outcomes.

Regarding specific roles, a considerable portion of SMC members did not actively participate in monitoring attendance, implementing Ministry of Education recommendations, and monitoring the quality of learning. The low extent of parental participation identified in the study is consistent with existing literature highlighting challenges in fostering active parent involvement in school activities (Epstein, 2018). Additionally, the study's findings on SMCs not actively engaging in crucial roles, such as monitoring attendance and implementing

Ministry of Education recommendations, mirror concerns raised in previous research regarding the inconsistent implementation of SMC responsibilities (UNESCO, 2017).

School Management Committees (SMCs) oversee the school's day-to-day operations, manage and operate bank account(s), and handle funds received for implementation, ensuring utmost accountability and transparency. Additionally, SMCs are responsible for safeguarding school properties and collaborating with the head teacher and teachers to formulate a comprehensive school development plan. The awareness of individual roles within the school committee is crucial as such training and relevant guidelines cannot be overemphasized. Parents, in particular, play a significant role in supporting school development to achieve its objectives. As Mbando and Hongoke (2010) noted, school committees are entrusted with managerial roles encompassing planning, organisation, direction, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of the entire school development plan. Effectively fulfilling these roles requires adept leadership from the head teacher and efficient management from the school committee members which can only be achieved if training is done.

An interesting finding was the positive relationship between training attendance and knowledge about the responsibilities of SMC. Those who attended training sessions demonstrated a higher level of expertise, emphasising the crucial role of training in equipping SMC members with the necessary skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The study's revelation of low knowledge levels among SMC members, mainly due to limited training participation, resonates with literature emphasising the significance of continuous training for effective committee performance (UNESCO, 2015). The positive relationship between training attendance and knowledge echoes findings in educational governance literature, stressing the pivotal role of training in empowering committee members (Anderson, 2018). The positive relationship between training and knowledge resonates with the broader discourse in educational governance literature. Anderson (2018) emphasises the transformative impact of training on the effectiveness of school boards and committee members. The study's results reinforce this perspective, highlighting how training equips SMC members with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Continuous training is essential for committee members to stay abreast of evolving educational policies, practices, and governance structures, UNESCO (2015).

5.2.3 Challenges that the SMCs face in Carrying out their roles

The major challenge according to this study is inadequate capacity due to a lack of training and relevant literature. The SMCs are willing to go above and beyond the call of duty but are hindered due to a lack of capacity because of being untrained on their roles and how they can carry them out. Another challenge is the poor dissemination and accessibility of the SMC guidelines, which are unavailable in schools, are in English, and do not have specific 'how to' guides or modules for specialised roles. They also face a lack of administrative know how to carry out their roles, mainly those related to infrastructure development which are specialized.

Low social, educational and financial status relative to teachers in some instances means that their voice is constrained. In addition, proprietorship of the schools still lies with either the churches or government at school level which limits the powers and influence of the SMCs. This means that they fail to serve as checks and balances to the school administrators. This too has led to compromising the quality of the primary education within the zones.

5.3 Recommendations

Given the challenges and opportunities noted in the study, the following are the recommendations to facilitate the roles of SMCs in the management of schools in the case study schools:

5.3.1 To the Ministry of Education

1. Facilitate the translation and distribution of the Guidelines on the Formation and Composition of SMCs in Primary Schools handbook to ensure uniformity in terms of composition and role discharge.
2. Develop specific modules for the different roles, such as financial management, resource mobilisation, etc. These should be more like 'how-to' step-by-step guides.
3. Develop a participation strategy and train school managers to form representative SMCs at the school level and create meaningful community participation in decision-making.
4. Increase the funding available to SMCs and help them devise means of generating financial resources in addition to the community contributions they currently rely on.
5. Organise national annual conferences for SMCs as forums for exchanging their views and experiences and where they can learn from each other and experts on substance use prevention.

5.3.2 To School Management

1. Prioritise capacity building of the SMCs in their roles.
2. Create exchange visits so members can share notes with their peers in other schools to promote the effective delivery of assigned tasks within their prescribed duties and responsibilities.
3. Schedule joint PTA, Mother group, and SMC meetings as forums for sharing information and challenges and strengthening cooperation and collaboration in school management.
4. Involve SMCs in running schools to ensure relevance and ownership.
5. Capitalise on the strengths of the SMCs, exploring their potential as a source of resources at the school.

5.3.3 To the SMCs

1. Lobby for more capacity-building training in their schools. SMCs need to be built and strengthened to perform their roles effectively. The SMCs should ensure that regular workshops and seminars are organised so that they are equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to monitor school programmes.
2. There should be minimum academic qualifications set for prospective members of School Management Committees (SMCs). There is a considerable level of literacy needed for one to be able to analyse, interpret, conceptualise and understand critical issues that should lead to informed decision-making, quality debate and synthesis of government policies.
3. Demonstrate their potential and confidence as the community's collective voice when dealing with other stakeholders, such as Headteachers and teachers, regardless of their education attainment levels or social standing.
4. A clear criterion for vetting candidates on School Management Committees (SMCs) should be considered specifically on the attribute of one's moral and social status in the community. The selection of members of the committee should be carefully made in view of one's social integrity, moral standing, and contribution to community welfare.

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the results of the research.

Table 5:1 Summary of the Results of the Research

Objective	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Level of knowledge of SMCs on their roles in ensuring quality primary education	a. Knowledge of the roles is superficial. b. Positive relationship between knowledge and improved education outcomes c. None existence of Guideline for Formation and Functioning of SMCs	a. Lack of capacity building as such there is knowledge gap leading to ineffective implementation of roles b. Poor access to SMC guidelines leading to a lack of knowledge c. Where the SMCs were aware of their roles, implementation was better	- Build capacity of SMCs through training - Make available the relevant literature in Primary Schools handbook to ensure uniformity in terms of composition and role discharge.
Implementation of SMCs in their given roles as a means of ensuring quality in primary education	a. Low extent of SMC participation in implementing school activities. b. Not all roles of SMCs are implemented c. Poor attendance of meetings	a. Low attendance of meetings and low extent of participation thus leading to ineffective implementation and compromising quality. b. Since not all roles are implemented, the effectiveness of SMCs is compromised leading to poor quality primary education.	- Build capacity of SMCs through training so that they implement all the roles - Community sensitization on the importance of participating in school activities. - Translation and distribution of the Guidelines on the Formation and Composition of SMCs in Primary Schools handbook to ensure the SMCs comprehend and implement the roles.
Challenges that the SMCs face in carrying out their roles	a. They lack power and influence b. Limited sources of information c. Capacity constraints	a. Power still lies with local & central government or churches as “proprietors” as such SMCs lack power and influence, they are susceptible to manipulation. b. There are gaps in understanding and implementation because of limited sources of information leading to actual or perceived limitations. c. Incapacitated because some roles are specialized d. Failing to serve as checks and balances because of low social, educational and financial status	- Involve SMCs in running schools to ensure relevance and ownership. - Support from other parts of the system such as local government. -minimum academic qualifications set for prospective members of SMCs so that they are able to analyse, interpret, conceptualise and understand critical issues that should lead to informed decision-making, quality debate and synthesis of government policies.

5.4 Contribution of the Study to Knowledge

The study has contributed to the body of knowledge which is critical in the delivery of education in Primary schools in Malawi and beyond:

1. The outcome of the study is of significant value to policymakers and administrators especially in the Ministry of Education in Malawi as it may assist them to evaluate their guidelines to promote efficiency in the implementation of education programs.
2. The study offers new insights and best practices which may assist school stakeholders improve education outcomes and governance and thus ensuring relevance and ownership.
3. It validates Open Systems Theory in decentralized education contexts.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

The study examined the role of SMC in improving the quality of Education in an education Zone. However, future studies need to go beyond this. The following are the areas this study proposes for future studies:

1. A quantitative analysis of the nexus between SMCs' capacity building through training and education outcomes is also necessary to identify factors that are more influential in improving the quality of primary education.
2. Teacher's attitudes and their effects on the participation of SMCs in decision-making in the schools.
3. Challenges faced by SMCs in implementing Disaster Risk Management in an education Zone.

5.6 Closing Remarks

On July 11, 2024, a parent from Spark School in the USA said that, 'it is no secret that community involvement in schools is a great tool to boost student engagement, relationships, grades, etc.' (Spark Generation <https://spark.school/>). In the context of Njelengwa Zone, SMCs represent community participation. The quotation therefore highlights how important SMCs are in the management of primary schools in Njelengwa. The findings of this study revealed

that capacity building of SMCs was inadequate. Although it is largely the duty of the Ministry of Education to capacitate SMCs, SMCs in Njelengwa Zone must take it upon themselves to be proactive in empowering themselves with knowledge and skills as precursor not only for meaningful involvement in the management of the schools, but for improved quality of the primary schools in the Zone as well.

References

- Abreh, M. K. (2017). Involvement of School Management Committees in school base management: Experience from two districts in Ghana. *Educational Planning*, 24(3), 61-75
- Acemoglu, D. & Dell, M. (2010). Productivity differences between and within countries. *American Economic Journal* 2(1), 1 69-1 88.
- Acheampong, K., Amuzu, D., & Eshun, E. (2019). Challenges of disseminating education Guidelines to community leaders: A case study of School Management Committees in Ghana. *Journal of Education Governance*, 15(2), 45-58.
- Adong Jenifer, A. (2018). *The School Management Committee's roles and performance of primary schools in Lamwo District, Uganda*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Kampala International University
- Ahrweiler, P. (2011). Modelling theory communities in science. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 14(4), 8.
- Ahiabor, F. (2017). *Assessing community participation in improving basic education delivery in the Gomoe East District*. Unpublished thesis. The University of Cape Coast.
- Ahmad, N. (2011). Participation in community development. *Current Research Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 15–16.
- Andoh-Robertson, T., Effah, S., Eshun, T.B., & Kwasi, A. (2020). Assessment of the performance of School Management Committees (SMCs) towards the attainment of quality basic education in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality of Ghana. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol.10, No.16, 2020
- Aryeh-Adjei, A. A. (2021). Community participation in the management of Ghanaian schools. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, pp. 10, 79–95.
- Bag, S.K., Das, B.C., & Dansana, A. (2020). Functioning of School Management Committees In tribal districts of Odisha. *Pedagogy of Learning*, 6 (3), 21-27.: <http://pedagogyoflearning.com>.
- Barnett, E. (2013). An analysis of community involvement in primary schools in Malawi. *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol 33, pp. 497–509
- Beasley, E., & Elise H. (2017). “Willing but unable? Short-term experimental evidence on parent empowerment and school quality.” *World Bank Economic Review* 31 (2):531–52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhv064>.

- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). *Social science research: Principles, methods, and practices*. University of South Florida.
- Bray, M. (1999). *Community partnerships in education: Dimensions, variations, and implications: EFA Thematic Study*. Report commissioned by HDNED World Bank for the Education for All Conference Dakar Senegal 26-28 April 2000. <https://web.worldbank.org/archive/website00238I/WEB/PDF/COMMUNIT.PDF>
- Brown, S., & Green, T. (2016). Longitudinal study on the impact of capacity-building initiatives on School Management Committees: A five-year review. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 30(4), 112–127.
- Bukenya, B. & King, S. (2012). *The contextual factors that shape social accountability*. The University of Manchester, UK: Institute for Development Policy and Management School of Environment and Development.
- Burleson, P., & Myburgh, H. (2018). Enhancing managerial skills of community leaders: A Review of training programs for School Management Committees. *Educational Leadership Review*, 25(3), 67-82.
- Caldwell, B. J. (2005). *School-based management*. Paris: UNESCO-IIEP and International Academy of Education.
- Carr-Hill, R., Rolleston, C. & Schendel, R. (2016). The effects of school-based decision-making on educational outcomes in low- and middle-income contexts: A Systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 12(1), pp.1-169.
- Chua, C. L. & Mosha, H. J. (2015). Managing school internal mechanisms for performance improvement in secondary education: Case of six secondary schools in Eastern Zone in Tanzania. *SAGE Open*. Oct-Dec, (pp1-9. doi:10.1177/2158244015610172
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dekker, (2010). *The Malawian view on community participation in school development: A qualitative program evaluation in the south of Malawi*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Utrecht University
- Dwivedi, R., & Naithani, A. (2015). Primary education in India: Role and responsibilities of School Management Committee under Right to Education Act, *SMS Varanasi*, 11 (1).
- Fraser, S., & Robinson, C. (2004). Paradigms and philosophy. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing Research with Children and Young People*. Sage.

- Geofrey, S. (2015). *The efficacy of school committees in the management of school resources in Rufiji District, Coast Region, Tanzania*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. The Open University of Tanzania.
- Government of Malawi (1962). *The Education Act*. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi
- Government of Malawi (1994). *The Constitution of Malawi*. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi
- Government of Malawi (1998) *Malawi Decentralisation policy*. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi.
- Government of Malawi, (2013). *The Education Act*. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi
- Hancock, B., Ockleford, E., & Windridge, K. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Nottingham and Sheffield: The NIHR RDS for the East Midlands / Yorkshire & the Humber.
- Isaacs, R., & Nkomo, S. (2021). Strategies for improving guideline accessibility and dissemination to community leaders: Lessons from School Management Committees in South Africa. *Educational Development Research*, 18(1), 89-104.
- Jean-Pierre, S. (2013). *The participation of the School Management Committee and parents-teacher association in the administration of basic schools in Obuasi municipality*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Cape Coast.
- Johnson, A., & Wang, L. (2019). The influence of managerial competencies on governance and decision-making processes in School Management Committees: A case study. *Educational Leadership Journal*, 36(2), 75–89.
- Kahn, R. L., & Katz, D. (1952). *Leadership practices in relation to productivity and morale* (pp. 612-628). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.
- Kaimenyi, E. N. (2013). *Factors influencing academic performance of students in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in Imenti North District, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Kingdom, E. and Maekae, J. (2013). 'The Role of Education in National Development: Nigerian Experience.' *European Scientific Journal*, vol.9, No.28
- Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), 26-41.
- Koua, D., Yao, F., & Tan, S. (2017). Understanding the impact of managerial skills on governance outcomes within School Management Committees. *Journal of Educational Governance*, 14(1), 30-45.

- Kumar, S. (2015). Roles and Functions of School Management Committees (SMCs) of government middle schools in District Kullu of Himachal Pradesh: A Case Study. *The Scholarly Research Journal* VOL. 3/17 www.srjis.com Page 3877
- Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson.
- Lythcott, J., & Duschl, R. (1990). Qualitative research: From methods to conclusions. *Science Education*, 74, 449-460.
- Marphantia, Edge, Legault and Archer (2010). *Politics of participation: Parental Support for Children's Learning and School Governance in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda*. The Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools Project (ILOPS). Research Report on Parent's Participation. London: Action Aid and University of London
- Mansuri, G, & Rao, V. (2013). *Localising development: Does participation work?* Washington, DC: World Bank. DOI: 10.1596/978-0-8213-8256-1.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (4th Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2004), *National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (2008). *Malawi National Education Sector Plan*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
- Ministry of Education (2019). *Malawi Education Sector Investment Plan*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Education (2022). *Guidelines for formation and functioning of the School Management Committee in primary schools*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Education
- Mugabe, R. (2019). How School Management Committees monitor the implementation of universal primary education in Uganda. *International Journal of Education and Research* Vol. 7 (3)
- Muthoni, C.K. (2015). The impact of community involvement in the public secondary in school management. Unpublished Master's thesis, Kenyatta University
- National Planning Commission (2020). *Malawi Vision 2063: An inclusively wealthy and self-reliant nation*. Lilongwe: National Planning Commission.
- Nguyen, H., & Nguyen, T. (2018). Integrating disaster risk management training into capacity-building programs for School Management Committees: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Disaster Management*, 22(3), 56-71.

- Nishimura, M. (2017). Community participation in school management in developing countries. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.
- Nyandro, J., Mapfumo, J. & Makoni, R., (2013). Effectiveness of School Development Committees in Financial Management in Chimanimani West Circuit Primary School In Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No. 1.
- OAU, (1981). *African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights*. Addis Ababa: Organisation of African Unity
- OAU, (1990). *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*. Addis Ababa: Organisation of African Unity.
- OECD (2010), "What are the social benefits of education?" in *Highlights from Education at a Glance 2010*. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2010-20-en
- Osei-Owusu, B., & Sam, F. (2012). Assessing the role of School Management Committees (SMCs) in improving quality teaching and learning in Ashanti Mampong municipal basic schools. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, Volume 3, (5)
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, pp. 42, 533–544.
- Priyadarshinee, P., & Gowramma, I.P. (2018). Awareness level of school management development committee members regarding their roles and responsibilities. *Journal of Indian Education, JIE*, XLIV (2)
- Rajapaksa, A., Perera, L., & Gunawardana, N. (2020). Assessing the effectiveness of training programs for community leaders: A case study of School Management Committees in Sri Lanka. *Educational Policy Analysis*, 17(4), 102-118.
- Rao, V. S. (2009). Lack of community participation in elementary education in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: A Case Study. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(8).
- Rashid, S. (2014). Inhibitors of School Management Committees in promoting quality basic education: A study of selected primary schools in Blantyre. In *International Conference on Social Sciences & Humanities*. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sufyan-Rashid-2/amp>

- Rout, S. K. (2014). Functioning of School Management Committee in rural elementary school: A case study. *Journal of Chitkara University*, 2(2), 247–254. doi: 10:15415/ije.2014.22018
- Sehrawat, M., & Roy, M.M. (2021). Expected roles and functions of the School Management Committee: An investigation for effective functioning. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol 2, (1), pp 79-92
- Sele, A. P. (2020). Emphasis on curriculum contents in civic education for secondary schools in Nigeria. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(3), 139–151.
- Sethi, C. & Muddgal, A. (2017). A study of the role of SMC, as mentioned in the Right to Education Act, 2009, among Municipal Corporation Primary Schools of Delhi. *Learning Community*, Vol. 8 (1), 39–47.
- Shibuya, K. (2013). Challenges in educational development in Africa and JICA's Approach. In *For Inclusive and Dynamic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Tokyo: JICA Research Institute
- Silberstein, J. (2023). Should communities be managing, governing or supporting schools? A Review essay on the system conditions under which different forms of community voice can improve student learning. *RISE Working Paper Series*. 23/141. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2023/141
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (4th ed.). Sage Publications Ltd: London.
- Silverman, D. (2011). A guide to the principles of qualitative research. Sage Publications Ltd: London.
- Smith, J., & Jones, M. (2020). Exploring the integration of disaster risk management into the roles of community leaders: Perspectives from School Management Committees in rural areas. *Journal of Community Development*, 28(2), 45–60.
- Srivastava, A.P. (2018). Study on the awareness of school management committees on RTE rules and their role, *International Journal of Current Research and Modern Education*, 3(1).
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Teddy, L. (2019). *Role of the school management committee in improving students' academic performance in Tanzania: A case of ward secondary schools in Ubungo District, Dar-es-salaam*, Unpublished Dissertation, Mzumbe University, Tanzania.

- Thien, L. M., & Razak, N. A. (2012). A proposed framework of school organisation from open system and multilevel organisation theories. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 20(6), 889-899.
- Tieng'o, E. W. B. (2019). *Community participation and perceptions on project-based support to public primary schools: Implications for sustainable basic education in Rorya District, Tanzania*. Phd. Dissertation. Unpublished
- Tshabangu, I., & Msafiri, A. (2013). Quality education in Tanzania: Perceptions on global challenges and local needs. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 3(3), 800-813.
- UN (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: General Assembly resolution 217 A*. New York: United Nations.
- UN (1966). *International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights*. New York: United Nations
- UN (1979). *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*. New York: United Nations
- UN (1989). *United Nations Convention on the rights of the child*. New York: United Nations
- UN (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDP (2024). *What are the Sustainable Development Goals?* United Nations Development Programme. <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/quality-education>.
- UNESCO & UNICEF (2007). *A human rights-based approach to education for all: A framework for realising children's right to education and rights within education*. New York: UNICEF
- UNESCO (1960). *Convention against discrimination in education*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- UNESCO (2011). *UNESCO and Education*. New York: UNESCO
- UNESCO (2020). *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning objectives*. UNESCO Publishing. DOI: 10.18356/6bca7df9-en
- UNICEF (2019). *Education: Every Child's Right*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/education>
- United Nations Girls' Education Initiative. (2006). 'Girls Too! Education for all, *UNGEI Fact Sheet*. <www.ungei.org>.
- Uzor, E. (2017). Examining Nigeria's Learning Crisis: Can Communities be Mobilised to Take Action? *CSEA Discussion Paper DPS/1/17/01*

- Vieira, S. L. (2007). Políticas e gestão da educação básica: revisitando conceitos simples. *Revista Brasileira de Política e Administração da Educação*, 23(1), 53-69. doi:10.21573/vol23n12007.19013
- Watkins, S., & Adam A. (2019). An analysis of the political economy of schooling in rural Malawi: Interactions among parents, teachers, students, chiefs and Primary Education Advisors.” *RISE Working Paper* 19/031.
- Williams, R., Lee, C., & Thompson, P. (2021). Long-term effects of capacity-building initiatives on School Management Committees: A ten-year follow-up study. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40(1), 78–92.
- World Bank (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. World Bank Publications. DOI: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for PEA, Headteachers and Teachers

1. Tell me a little bit about SMCs in your School/Zone. What type of activities are they involved in?
2. What procedures are followed in forming SMCs in the school?
3. Are you aware of the roles of the SMCs? In your opinion, does the SMC at this school discharge all of them? If Partial, which ones do they discharge?
4. What skills and knowledge does the SMC have that are critical in managing schools?
5. How important are SMCs in the management of schools?
6. How do SMCs work with other stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and administrators, on the management of schools?
7. What challenges do you perceive SMCs face in implementing their roles and responsibilities?

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview guide for the SMC Chair

1. Tell me a little bit about the SMCs at this school (what is it about? What is its composition? How are the members chosen?) What type of activities are they involved in?
2. For how long have you been a member of the SMC?
3. What procedures do you follow regarding the formation of SMCs?
4. According to your understanding, what roles should SMCs play?
7. a. Have you attended any SMC training since you were elected?
 - b. If No, how do you implement assigned roles and responsibilities?
8. In your opinion, does the SMC discharge all its roles and responsibilities? If partial, which ones do they discharge?
9. How do SMCs work with other stakeholders such as teachers, parents, administrators and fellow students in the school's management?
10. In your experience, what challenges do you face when implementing roles and responsibilities?

Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Protocol (with the SMC)

Introduction

Welcome! My name is Clement Nyirenda, and I am from Mzuzu University. I am doing research on *Assessing the Roles of School Management Committees in the Njেলংwa Zone as a partial fulfilment* of the requirements of the award of the Master's Degree. Today, I would like to hear your opinions and experiences about the performance of the SMCs in improving education quality.

To make it easier for me and to prevent me from forgetting the important things you say, I will record this discussion. However, your answers will be CONFIDENTIAL because I will not use your name in my final report. I will replace your names with fake names or code numbers so the answers can never be traced back to you.

Your participation in this discussion is also VOLUNTARY, meaning you do not have to respond to anything you do not want to. However, your honest answers are extremely important because they will help me understand the topic under study to inform policy formulation and the development of interventions on the involvement of student councils in the management of drug and substance abuse cases among students in secondary schools.

As a GROUND RULE, please ensure that we respect each other's opinions and do not interrupt or speak over others when it is their turn. We are here to learn from each other and not to judge one another. Before we start, let us make a PLEDGE: Please raise your hand and say, "I promise that I will not reveal what we discuss here to others or tell them who participated in this discussion."

Do you have any questions before we start? Would we begin?

1. Tell me a little bit about the SMCs at this school (what is it about? What is its composition?

How are the members chosen?) What type of activities are they involved in?

2. For how long have you been a member of the SMC?

3. What procedures do you follow regarding the formation of SMCs?

4. According to your understanding, what are the roles the SMCs are supposed to play?

7. a. Have you attended any SMC training since you were elected?

b. If No, how do you implement assigned roles and responsibilities?

8. In your opinion, does the SMC discharge all its roles and responsibilities? If partial, which ones do they discharge?

9. How do SMCs work with other stakeholders such as teachers, parents, administrators and fellow students in the management of the school?
10. In your experience, what challenges do you face when implementing roles and responsibilities?
11. Any general comment on SMCs and this school

Appendix 4: Document Review Log

School Code.....

S/No	Document Analysed	Remarks
1	School Management Committee meeting Minutes	
2	School Improvement Plan	
3	Annual budget	
4	Financial report	
5	School Log Book	
6	Guidelines for Formation and Functioning of the SMCs in Primary Schools booklet	
7	Education Act	
8	School Development Plan	
9	SMC Training Manual	

Appendix 5: Consent Form



Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC)

Informed Consent Form for Research in School Management Committees

Introduction

I am **Clement Mwiza Nyirenda** from **Mzuzu University**. We are doing research on **Examining the Role of School Management in Improving the Quality of Primary Education: A Case of Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District**. 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 another researcher.

Purpose of the research

This research aims to examine the role played by SMCs in improving quality education within Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District.

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 have in-depth knowledge and experience on the topic of understudy.

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 of 30 minutes per interview/ 60minutes per focus group discussion.

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 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 Prof. Victor Mgomezulu, Mzuzu University, Education Foundations Department. P/Bag, 201, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2. Cell: 0993962871.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the 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, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2, Phone: 0999404008/0888641486

Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent

*I have been invited to participate in research about **Examining the role of School Management in improving the quality of primary education: A case of Njelengwa Zone in Chitipa District.***

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.

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

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.

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 6: Letter of Introduction



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

**Department of Teaching, Learning and
Curriculum Studies**

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
Luwingu
Mzuzu 2
MALAWI

Tel: (265) 01 320 575/722
Fax: (265) 01 320 568
mdolo.mm@mzuni.ac.mw

23rd October 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MR CLEMENT NYIRENDA

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

Kindly assist him accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo

Program Coordinator

Appendix 7: Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee Letter of Approval



MZUZU UNIVERSITY
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
Luwinga
Mzuzu 2
MALAWI
TEL: 01 320 722
FAX: 01 320 648

MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/77

17/07/2023.

Clement Nyirenda,
Mzuzu University,
P/Bag 201,
Luwinga,
Mzuzu 2.

clementmnyirenda@gmail.com

Dear Clement,

**RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR
PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/77: ASSESSING THE ROLES OF
SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES (SMCs) IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY
OF EDUCATION (A CASE OF NJELENGWA ZONE IN CHITIPA DISTRICT).**

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

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

Committee Address:

*Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2;
Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw*

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



Gift Mbwele

SENIOR RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR

For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIREC

Committee Address:

***Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2;
Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw***