

**Investigating factors that influence parents to send their children
To single sex schools in Malawi: Case study of selected secondary schools in Chiladzulu Mulanje
and Thyolo District**

By

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Declaration

I Victor Maida J.H. hereby declare that this study is my own original work, and it has not been submitted for degree or examination at any other university. All the sources that have used or quoted have been acknowledged by complete references.

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Dedication

This work has been dedicated to my first-born daughter, Patricia, who was selected to secondary school when I was about to begin my MED Programme. Perhaps more than else she so much missed my attention for her secondary school studies since I was also busy with my academic work. Sometimes she could call me to remind me to work hard so that the fees should not go in vain. I always prayed to GOD for her good future.

Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of Malawians on single-sex schools, focusing on Chiradzulu and Mulanje Districts. The primary objectives were to identify the factors influencing parents to send their children to single-sex schools, assess learners' perceptions and attitudes towards these schools, and examine differences in academic performance between learners in single-sex and co-educational schools. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Data were gathered through surveys and interviews with parents, students, teachers, and local leaders. The qualitative data provided in-depth insights into personal experiences and perceptions, while the quantitative data offered statistical evidence to support these findings. Results indicated that parents prefer single-sex schools due to their perceived focused learning environment, strict discipline, and strong academic reputation. Learners in single-sex schools reported fewer distractions and better academic performance. However, some students expressed concerns about limited socialization opportunities in single-sex schools, potentially impacting their ability to adapt to mixed-gender environments later in life. Comparatively, students in co-educational schools valued the diverse social interactions and balanced perspectives provided by a mixed-gender setting, which they believe prepares them better for real-world situations. Based on these findings, the study recommends promoting balanced educational environments that combine the strengths of both single-sex and co-educational models. Schools should enhance their academic support systems and incorporate programs that foster social skills and gender inclusivity. Additionally, there should be a focus on improving teacher professionalism and reducing discrimination in co-educational settings to ensure equitable academic outcomes. Policymakers should also consider these factors when developing educational policies to cater to diverse student needs and preferences.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACLU	:	The American Civil Liberties Union
CES	:	Co-Education Schools
EDM	:	Education Division Manager
GET	:	Gender Equity Task Team
MOEST	:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NGO	:	Non-Government Organizations
PIF	:	Policy and Luvestmat Framework
SADC	:	Southern Africa Development Community
SSS	:	Single Sex Schools
UNICEF	:	United Nations Luternational Children’s Education Fund

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter introduced the study. It comprised the following: Back ground of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, rationale of the study, justification, significance of the study, operational definitions of terms and abbreviations that were used in the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is very essential to all human beings. According to Obeng et al (2011), education is a key to industrialisation and modernisation without which one might find it difficult to develop socially, economically and politically. Not only does education open up an individual to the world of people and things, but also equips one for future responsibilities, both personal and social ones. This is why education is taken as a basic key to employment in America, but also for all nations. This education means expansion of cultural horizons and employment opportunities to an individual as for the nation, it means enhances prospects of social and economic development. Development of human capacity was one of the objectives of every nation (Malunda, 2004). Thus each nation ensured that its citizens were offered education since it was an effective tool for political and social – economic empowerment.

Much as education was offered to both males and females, it was discovered that there was a high number of females who dropped out of school before the completion of a particular education cycle. This came in the wake of a call by the world Education forum, in the year 2000 to eliminate gender disparity at all school level and ensured that all children complete their basic primary education (IRIN, 2010). Much as education was offered to both males and females, single sex schools and co- educational schools had been established. Many countries continued to have a sizeable number of single sex- schools and the practice had gained ground in the United states of America in response to the underachievement of boys (Smyth, 2010). The United States of America in response had only two single sex public schools in the 1990's according to the New York Times (Ward, 2012) in the 2011-2012 school year, with more than 500 public schools in the United states of America offering single sex education opportunities (Nation Association for single sex public Education, 2011).

To advocate that model, the premise of single – sex education was two –pronged given that (1) each sex had unique biological and developmental needs and (2) Student grouped by sex would perform better without the distraction and social pressure of the presence of the other opposite sex Culson, (2002). However, saw no significant differences in Math and quantitative ability scores between single –sex and co-educational school girls. In recent decades, the debate over whether single sex schooling or co-education was superior had gained momentum in the field of education. There was polarization as to what was ideal (Ghaga, 2013; Boriado, 2011), With one school advocating co-education and the other single sex education (Bigler et al, 2014). This was worrying as it was common for arguments that are ideological and subject to a number of strong opinions to reach the general public before the scientific evidence does (Riordan, 2011). With regards to the topic that concerned us here, the likelihood of that happening was greater not just because the debate was still shaped very little by science and rather more by political religious and other types of opinion Mael et al, 2005, but also because even the academic research that did examine it has started to take on characteristics more closely linked to ideology than science.

The article published by Diane Halpern and her colleagues (Halpern et al, 2011) called “The pseudoscience of single sex schooling “After a very brief literature review, the authors concluded that single sex schooling had not been able to demonstrate positive education effects. But as far as history of single sex Education was concerned, there were some examples of co- education in the late 17th century, but there was no general trend until the mid- 1800 during the great expansion of public education in the United States (co-education, 2008) distinguished preparatory schools in Europe and early America were single – sex .present – day defenders of single sex schooling argued that there were more teenage pregnancies and sexual harassment cases in coeducation schools.

Many people strongly believed separating students by sex was appropriate and single –sex classrooms were in place up to the 1960s and even early 1970s to teach different lessons often in parallel subject matter Pollard, 1999). Classes were intended to prepare boys and girls for different roles in life; for example, boys were taught agriculture or industrial arts while girls were taught home economics (Cuizon, 2008). At present, the gap between the different roles or careers that men and women occupy had narrowed greatly and legally had nearly closed. Kaminer, a graduate of all female Smith college, keenly noted that American women won the right to be educated, nearly 100 years before winning the right to vote. She said “in the beginning women were educated for

the sake of family and society “, the new republic needed educated mothers to produce reasonable, responsible male citizens. But although the first all- female academics, provided in the early 1800s, reflected a commitment to traditional gender roles, which reserved the public sphere for men, they reinforced a nascent view of women as potentially reasonable human beings – endowed with attributes of citizenship” (Kaminer, 1988). Women`s colleges were also created and appropriately, represented affirmative action. Oberlin collegiate institute in Ohio was the first coeducational collage in 1837 (Kaminer, 1998). Though single sex- structures had been retained in some private and religious schools, coeducational schools were currently the predominate model without much challenge in the united states.

Many researchers added value to this logic while others refute it. Raiden (1994) asserted that – sex schools were beneficial for girls and minority, boys due to the reversal of the gender stratification norm” Minority boys were no longer expected to fail, However, Honker (2000) found that separation by sex did not guarantee higher test scores for minority and low income students in single – sex and co – education school” (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005). The American Civil liberties Union (ACLU) had been investigating the single sex public education program sending cease and desist letter to school districts and some cases filling federal law with varying results (Word, 2012) in May 2008, the ACLU filed suit in federal court, organ that Breckinridge country practiced of offering single sex classroom in its public middle school was illegal and discriminatory (Strawberry, n.b.) In Lovesiana, the ACLU represented parents who claimed that Vermillion parish middle school unconstitutionally separated pupils into single sex classes . The ACLU said the program was based on flawed data, relied heavily on gender stereotypes and had no positive effect on academic performance (Ward, 2012) In west Virginia, a judge issued a temporary injunction against conducting involuntary single sex class assignment at a public school (Sense & Vasquez,.2012). Single sex education opponents argued that “ gender based separation constitutes a return to structure inequality and especially troublesome possibility when single programs targeted students of particular racial and ethnic groups “ (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005).

In sub- Sahara Africa, education for girls in South Africa had followed two racially district courses historically. For the blacks, particularly Africa girls, provision came in the forms of state education schools, for white girls, the experience was either for single sex schools (State and Private) or of educational. In the late 1990`s the newly elected democratic government of South Africa appointed

a gender equality Task Team (GETT) to make recommendations on the schooling of girls. Amongst the recommendations was that single sex schools for girls should be established.

Single sex schools had historically been associated with elite education. British public schools (for boys and girls) were invariably single sex, South Africa, as with most of Britain's colonies, developed its schools according to British models in the mid to late nineteenth century. Effective from inception, schools were racially segregated. In the first decade of the twentieth century, schooling for white children became compulsory. Feminist also argued that girls were domesticated and set on a path of marriage and motherhood, that they were denied the chance to experiment with forms of sexuality other than heterosexual ones and that their career opportunities were deleterious affected (Arnot, 1989, Shaw, 1982, Spencer 1989). The understanding now is that monitoring and interviewing in gender practices including the explicit and hidden curriculum might offer a better way of ensuring gender justice than packaging education into either a co – education or single sex format (Barker, Riordan, Schaub, 1995, Donnell, Kessler, & Dow Set, 1982, Han Sot & Track, 1988).

In Malawi , there are also single –sex schools which are mission owned schools, private schools and government schools .In Malawi, single sex schools started in 1942 by catholic missionaries, Zomba catholic boys secondary school was the first single sex school to be opened. Other single sex schools in Malawi are: Stella Marris girls secondary school found in Blantyre, Ludzi girls secondary school found in Mchinji, Lilongwe girls secondary school found in Lilongwe, Dedza Boys secondary found in Dedza , and Mary Mount catholic secondary school found in Mzuzu city.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Perceptions of single-sex schools have sparked mixed reactions globally. Some countries favor single-sex schools over co-educational schools, while others prefer a combination of both. There is an ongoing debate about the impact of single-sex schooling on students' self-esteem, academic self-concept, and their sense of efficacy in gender-typical subjects. Historically, the consensus in the UK was that co-educational schooling was healthier for both sexes and provided more opportunities for girls and boys to study non-traditional subjects (Dale, 1969, 1971, 1974). However, this view has been challenged. Feminists argue that girls' interests are often overlooked in mixed schools, where boys tend to receive more attention from teachers and girls may face

sexual harassment. Conversely, some believe that the co-educational environment disadvantages boys, who may benefit more from male role models and have different learning styles compared to girls (Jackson, 2020).

Research indicates that both boys and girls are less likely to pursue non-traditional subjects in mixed schools due to the pressure to conform to gender stereotypes (Smith, 2018; Francis, 2019). In contrast, Spielhofer et al. (2021) found that students in single-sex schools in England and Wales were more likely to take subjects like physics, chemistry, or biology at the GCSE level compared to their counterparts in mixed schools. Despite girls' overall better performance at GCSE exams, their academic self-concept remains highly gendered (Marsh et al., 2020; Schilling et al., 2019). For example, girls are less likely than boys to be entered into higher-tier GCSE math exams, partly due to their greater anxiety about failure (Elwood, 2020; Stobart et al., 2019).

In Malawi, recent studies have shown that teachers often view boys as high achievers and girls as low achievers, contributing to girls' underperformance in both Junior Certificate and Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations (Mbano, 2020; Kamwendo, 2021; World Bank, 2022). However, there are limited studies specifically investigating the factors that influence parents to send their children to single-sex schools in Malawi. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying these influencing factors.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General Objective

To uncover the perceptions of Malawians on Single Sex Schools.

1.1.2 Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives

2. To identify factors that influence parents to send their children to single sex schools in Chiradzulu and Mulanje Districts.
3. To assess' perceptions and attitudes on single sex schools by learners.
4. To examine how single sex learners, differe in academic performance with those learners in coeducational schools.

1.3.3 Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence parents to send their children to single sex schools in Chiradzulu and Mulanje Districts?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes on single sex schools by learners?
3. How do single sex learners, differed in academic performance with those learners in coeducational schools?

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The rationale of the study was to identify factors that influence parents to send their children to single sex schools. If the factors were discovered, the Malawians could know the actual realities of single sex schools and coeducational schools. Among other things, Malawians could be enlightened on the advantages and disadvantages of both single sex schools and coeducational schools.

The findings could also enlighten parents, in general, with the present implications, and the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders on the merits of constructing single sex schools and mixed sex schools in a balanced manner so that parents might choose i.e. which school their child could go to.

1.5 Study Justification

The rationale for this study is to identify the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in single-sex schools in Malawi. By uncovering these factors, this research aims to provide a clearer understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of single-sex versus coeducational schools in the Malawian context. The findings from this study will contribute to the existing literature by enriching the understanding of educational choices and their implications for students' development and academic outcomes. This research will also inform policy formulation by providing evidence-based insights into the preferences and perceptions of parents regarding school type. The study also seeks to guide stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, in developing policies that support a balanced approach to school construction, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of parents in Malawi. This approach aims to empower parents with informed decisions regarding their children's educational pathways, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the overall education system.

1.6 Operational Definitions of Terms

In the realm of educational settings, **single-sex schools** are institutions that cater exclusively to either boys or girls, segregating students based on gender (Smith, 2018). These schools aim to provide an environment tailored to the specific educational and social needs perceived to be unique to each gender group. Conversely, coeducational schools adhere to a traditional model where both boys and girls learn together in the same classroom setting, utilizing conventional teaching methods such as direct instruction and board-based learning approaches (Francis, 2019).

Mixed-Gender Schools, on the other hand, accommodate students of both sexes within a unified educational environment, promoting integrated learning experiences and social interactions between boys and girls (Jackson, 2020). This approach is intended to foster a diverse educational atmosphere that reflects broader societal norms and encourages collaboration across genders.

Gender itself denotes the culturally defined roles, behaviors, and attributes assigned to individuals based on their perceived biological sex (Dale, 2020). It encompasses not only physical characteristics but also social expectations and norms that influence how individuals are perceived and treated within educational settings.

Perception, in educational contexts, refers to an individual's understanding or interpretation of circumstances or phenomena based on factual analysis rather than purely subjective viewpoints (Marsh et al., 2020). It involves the reasoned evaluation of information to form judgments about educational approaches, including the benefits and drawbacks of different school types.

Attitude, on the other hand, reflects an individual's emotional or evaluative stance towards educational practices, influenced by personal experiences, beliefs, and societal influences (Spielhofer et al., 2021). Attitudes towards single-sex versus coeducational schooling can significantly impact parental decision-making and educational policy formulation.

Gender-based violence encompasses acts perpetrated against individuals based on their gender, leading to physical, sexual, or psychological harm. This includes coercion, threats, or deprivation of liberty, occurring in both public and private spheres (World Bank, 2022). Addressing gender-based violence is crucial within educational settings to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students, regardless of school type.

These definitions and concepts are foundational in understanding the dynamics of educational environments and the implications of school type on student development and societal perceptions. They underscore the importance of informed decision-making and policy development to support inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Introduction

Single Sex education refers to both classes and schools that have only one sex, defined by a biological classification. Apart from that rooted was the first all-female schools in 1700s single sex education refer to elementary, secondary and post-secondary educational settings in which male and female students attended classes or schools exclusively with members of their own sex (United States Department of Education, 2005). Many countries continued to have a sizable number of single sex schools and the practice had gained ground in the United States of America in response to the underachievement of boys (Smyth, 2010). Several states and local districts are experimenting with this model by creating single sex classes and or schools.

2.1 Empirical Literature

2.1.1 Factors Influencing Parents' Choice of Single-Sex Schools

In exploring the factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in single-sex schools, several key determinants have emerged from recent research. One significant factor is the perceived academic advantage associated with single-sex education. Parents often believe that gender-specific learning environments can enhance focus and academic performance, particularly in subjects traditionally associated with gender stereotypes (Spielhofer et al., 2021). Studies indicate that parents view single-sex schools as offering tailored educational experiences that cater to specific gender-related learning styles and preferences (Francis, 2019).

Another critical consideration for parents is safety and discipline within school environments. Research suggests that some parents perceive single-sex schools as providing a safer and more disciplined atmosphere compared to coeducational settings, which may influence their decision-making process (Jackson, 2020). Socioeconomic factors also play a role, as families with higher incomes or specific cultural beliefs may prioritize single-sex education based on perceived social status or educational outcomes (Smith, 2018).

Parental beliefs about gender roles in education contribute significantly to their preference for single-sex schools. Cultural and societal norms regarding academic achievement and gender expectations influence how parents perceive the benefits of single-sex education for their children

(Marsh et al., 2020). Understanding these factors is crucial for policymakers and educators seeking to address parental concerns and promote informed decision-making in school choice.

2.1.2 Perceptions and Attitudes towards Single-Sex Schools among Learners

Learners' perceptions and attitudes towards single-sex schools are shaped by their educational experiences, social interactions, and broader cultural contexts. Recent studies indicate that students in single-sex schools may perceive benefits such as reduced distractions and enhanced academic focus (Smith, 2018). These perceptions are often influenced by the educational environment's emphasis on gender-specific teaching methods and classroom dynamics that cater to individual learning needs (Francis, 2019).

Attitudes towards single-sex schooling can also reflect broader societal views on gender equality and educational equity. Learners' experiences of socialization and interaction within single-sex environments may impact their attitudes towards school climate and gender dynamics (Marsh et al., 2020). Understanding these attitudes is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of single-sex schooling in meeting learners' educational and developmental needs.

Perceptions of academic and social outcomes in single-sex schools can vary among learners based on their personal experiences and educational aspirations. Research suggests that while some students may thrive in single-sex settings due to perceived academic advantages or social comfort, others may feel restricted by gender stereotypes or miss out on opportunities for diverse social interactions (Jackson, 2020). These nuanced perceptions highlight the importance of considering individual learner needs and preferences in educational policy and practice.

2.2 Academic Performance Differences between Single-Sex and Coeducational Schools

Comparative studies on academic performance between single-sex and coeducational schools yield varied findings, reflecting the complex interactions between school environment, teaching practices, and student outcomes. Some research suggests that students in single-sex schools may achieve higher academic performance in specific subjects like sciences or languages (Spielhofer et al., 2021). This outcome is often attributed to focused teaching methods and curriculum adaptations that cater to gender-specific learning styles and preferences.

However, academic performance differences between single-sex and coeducational schools can depend significantly on contextual factors such as school resources, teacher quality, and

educational policies (Francis, 2019). Studies indicate that while single-sex schooling may offer advantages in certain academic domains, coeducational settings can foster social skills and collaboration that are valuable in diverse educational and professional contexts (Marsh et al., 2020).

Academic self-concept and performance outcomes can differ significantly between genders within different school settings, influencing educational trajectories and perceptions of success (Smith, 2018). These findings underscore the need for nuanced approaches to educational research and policy that consider both academic outcomes and broader developmental impacts of school environment on students.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Theory of Natural Differences

The study used the Theory of Natural Differences (Gilson, 2002). The theory said: Once driving force in the single sex education movement and explanation for those performance disparities, was the theory of natural differences in how male and females learn that suggested that genders were "wired" differently (Stauber, 2006). The theory of Natural Difference states that boys and girls are different when it comes to learning. Teaching them separately make both sexes to learn better than teaching them together in the same school or classroom. Sax said there are no differences between boys and girls in terms of what they could learn. 'But there were,' he said, 'big differences in the way to teach them.' Researchers and authors such as Leonard Sax and neuropsychiatrist Lovann Brizendine, promoted gender achievement gap as a significant neurobiological difference between the sexes. Sax asserted that emotional and languages are processed in the same area of the brain for girls, but not for boys; girls have more sensitive hearing than boys, and boys and girls responded to stress differently (Cable & Spradlin 2008). These were some examples between the sexes that had a tremendous impact on their education experience according to Sax. Thus gender specific schooling, coupled with specific teachings Strategies meet the unique developmental needs of each gender and their respective learning style.

So if people are not aware of the biological make up of boys and girls, would end up having different perceptions and attitudes towards single Sex Schools education. The perceptions and attitudes might be good or bad depending on the individual.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework by Teresa A. Hughes. The advantages of single sex education. (Klein Independent school district prairie view A and M University educational leadership. Doctor of philosophy programme student) I. 2006-2007. This framework said that girls work hard and without distractions when they are working on their own in the absence of boys. On the other way round, boys also work extra hard when they are working in the absence of girls. The framework further said that in single sex schools, girls are able to take challenging subjects like Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics and do it well, unlike what happened in the Co-educational schools, where girls feel shy and ashamed of being failures. But I also perceived that there are some girls who liked schooling in Co-education schools and work hard to compete with boys and surpass them. Putting such girls in single sex schools, they could not work hard as they could have done in co-education schools. Females could achieve higher learning than males because they are more persistent and committed than males, (Richardson & Woo, 2003)

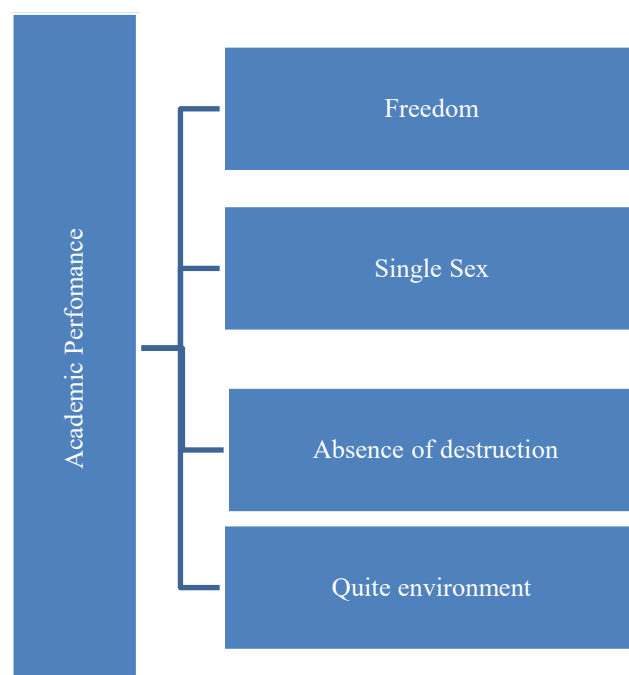


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter described the research design which was employed to informing this study. The chapter also focused on the following areas: , paradigm, participants and research site, sampling techniques data collection instruments, data analysis, ethical consideration and limitations and delimitation.

3.2 Research Design

Basically, qualitative descriptive case study design was used. The nature of the issue which was researched were factors that influenced parents to send their children to single Sex Schools in Chiradzulu and Mulaje districts and the nature of task that was undertaken in depth examination of perceptions and attitudes from the perspective of learners, teachers, parents, civil society and local leaders that were warranted this design be employed. Further, this study was stressed on understanding of the setting, nature of data, holistic approach, selection of participants and inductive data analysis. The qualitative descriptive case study design was used because it allowed an in depth, more open and detailed study of the selected issues (Mosquito 1996). Additional to that, it was used because the issue concerns the perceptions and attitudes and like the experience of learner's, teachers and parents as they interact in their environment (Carson, 2001, Holiday, 2002).

The qualitative descriptive case study design was chosen because it helped to obtain a more realistic fever of the world that could not be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in qualitative research and provided a holistic view of the issue under investigation (Motvee, 2002). Furthermore, qualitative approach was used in order to provide a better understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of people towards single Sex Schools. As a qualitative study, it was used to prove into the perceptions and attitudes not in a coloration way but as perceived by those experienced by it. This was in depth study of 53 participants from three schools which were sampled purposively. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting the sample by taking subjects that are not based on the level or area, but it is taken based on the specific purpose (Arikunto 2010:183). Purposive sampling is where the researcher selects a sample based on the needs of the study.

3.3 Paradigm

According to Martens (2005), a paradigm is an ideal or model. He asserted that there are three philosophical grounding of paradigm in research. The first is positivism. The second is constructivism, also called interpretivist and the last one is emancipatory, also called critical theory.

The researcher believed probing into the perception and attitudes of people in selected secondary schools in Chiradzulu and Mulanje as an exercise which required an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was appropriate because it allowed interaction between the researcher and the participants. Secondly the unstructured interview was used to enable multiple realities which was anticipated to be experienced. In fact, that was due to the fact that two people do not perceive realities in the same way. Furthermore, Ndengu (2012:14), sheds more light on that when he related that interpretivist captures the lives of participants in order to understand and interpreted the meaning they attach to social issues. Thirdly, the values of the researcher was acknowledged, made explicit and adopted. Additionally, attempts were made to construct meaning and perceptions and attitudes from the participant's perspectives. As it was required, judgement was based upon consensus of participants and the researcher. Most importantly, that study was fully depended on the researcher to interpret the meaning of the results.

3.4 The Population and Sample

3.4.1 Study Setting

Chiradzulu, Mulanje and Thyolo districts were the social setting for this research. Chiradzulu, Mulanje and Thyolo districts are found in the southern region of Malawi. More than 70 percent of people in these districts are "Lomwes", who originated from Mozambique in the 1930s due to tribal wars in Mozambique.

3.4.2 Study Population

The population comprised school teachers, students, parents and local leaders of Chiradzulu and Mulanje districts. The secondary schools selected were for boys and another one was for girls only. Selected learners were taken aboard for that research. In the same vein, the teachers and parents as well as local leaders were also targeted. The three selected schools were single sex schools and the issue under that study was to identify factors that influenced parents to send their children to single sex schools.

3.4.3 Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this study, consisting of fifty-three participants from three selected schools, was determined through the principle of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when new data collection ceases to provide additional or substantially different information relevant to the research questions. In this case, the sample composition deliberately included 8 teachers, 32 students, 8 parents, and 5 local leaders, ensuring a diverse representation of key stakeholders involved in the educational context under investigation. By reaching out to these specific groups, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences related to the influence of single-sex schooling on academic performance, social dynamics, and perceptions among students and their broader community.

The selection of fifty-three participants was strategic, aiming not only to achieve data saturation but also to ensure depth and richness in qualitative insights. Each participant group—teachers, students, parents, and local leaders—was chosen based on their roles and direct involvement in or impact on the educational environment. This approach facilitated a nuanced exploration of how single-sex schooling influences various aspects of educational outcomes and societal perceptions. Through this structured sampling strategy, the study sought to provide robust findings that could inform educational policies and practices regarding school type preferences and their implications for student development and academic achievement.

3.4.4 Sampling Techniques

Sampling is concerned with the selection of a sub set of individuals from within the statistical population to estimate characteristics of the whole population (Franklin, 2012). In view of that design, convenient sampling was used. Again, equivalence in academic performance overall between the two selected schools and equivalent age characteristics as well as teacher qualifications that would make entry characteristics equal and not bias findings in any direction. Purposeful sampling was used for selecting teachers, students, parents and local leaders as participants. This researcher was used to discover, understand and gain deeper insight into the perception and attitudes of people (Merriam, 2009). As Palton (1990) puts it those participants provided information rich cases for an in-depth study.

3.5 Data Collection

There are several ways of collecting data in qualitative research. Some of them include interviews, observations and review of documents and records (Mertene, 2005). As regards interviews, Puch (2009) distinguished three types of interviews, namely the structured interviews, the focused or semi-structured interviews also known as group interviews and the unstructured interviews. Interviews were the researchers' main method of collecting data. Both the semi-structured and unstructured interviews were used. This was because the interview was an important data technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the subject. Interviews were commonly used in survey designs and in exploratory and descriptive studies. Subjects were allowed to talk freely about whatever they wished to highly structure in which the subject responses were limited to answering direct questions.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves taking what you have apart; examining details and putting it back again in more condensed and meaningful way (Sharp, 2012). An effectiveness data analysis process involved a clear exposition of complex arguments and issues, identifying causal relationships, comparing, contrasting, identifying and challenging assumptions (Burton et al, 2008). Data was analyzed thematically. This involved transcribing the recorded interviews. Transcribing was used to make sense of the data collected to identify patterns or trends in relation to a specific phenomenon using computer software packages of Microsoft Excel. Whenever possible, tables and graphs were used to show the relationship between a single sex school students and mixed sex schools in terms of performance. That was purely qualitative approaches for analysis which was thematic and content analysis.

Linnerberg and Corsgaard (2020) defined coding as a process of detecting pieces of meaning in the data and assigning them labels with a code that could be defined as a 'word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data'(Wicks, 2017). On the other hand, Ngalube (2015) described coding as a technique that aids scholars to move data to a high level of abstraction as it played a significant role in identifying categories. Analysis of qualitative data involved reading a large number of transcripts, looking for similarities or differences and subsequently finding themes and developing categories. In that study transcripts from the interviewee was coded, analyzed, and

categorized for emerging and recurring themes in relation to the theoretical framework in the literature review.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

The study used various strategies as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to enhance rigour and trustworthiness to promote validity and reliability. Those strategies were triangulation, adequate engagement in data collection, peer review examination. Triangulation was done by using multiple data collection methods such as questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, to ensure content validity, the research instruments were piloted on one school before using them on the research sample. Validity analysis procedures which were followed, for instance, it was done to ensure trustworthiness or content validity of the interview or questionnaire items through piloting and for reliability items were done through Cronbach Alpha, where the value of Alpha Cronbach was less than 0.6 considered low. Alpha Cronbach values in the range of 0.60-0.80 were considered moderate, but acceptable. While Alpha Cronbach in the range of 0.8 and up to 1.00 was considered very good.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

For each respondent that took part in the study, informed consent was sought. Confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed as no names or addresses or any other personal identifying mark was solicited from them. Thus, there could be no known risk, social or physical that would rise from participating in the study. The researcher could also ensure that respect for students and communities where they came from would be guaranteed and that they had the right to withdraw from the research if they wished so. That study protected research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might be reflected on their organization or institutions and cope with new challenging problems. The researcher would make sure that participants were not put to risk by observing confidentiality to their views. That study used participants at research site as a way of ensuring confidentiality of the collected information and protecting them from any sort of harm. The researcher could not use language or words that were biased against person's based on gender, sexual and age. Participants were also acknowledged in that study by making us as unbiased language.

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

The methodology of the research guided the whole process of data collection and analysis. The section mainly presented the process that was involved in sampling data analysis and instrumentation. The section also highlighted on the design and the research approach as well as ethical consideration that was employed. The next chapter presented the analysis data, interpretation of the data and discussion of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents research findings from two single-sex and one co-educational school in Chiradzulu, Mulanje, and Thyolo districts, involving 56 participants including teachers, students, parents, and local leaders. The study used questionnaires and guided interviews to investigate factors influencing parents, teachers, students, and local leaders in choosing single-sex over co-educational schools. Key factors identified included child gender, school reputation, academic performance, peer pressure, discipline, leadership skills, subject availability, school environment, and career prospects. The research aimed to understand motivations behind school choice in these districts, highlighting complex influences such as societal norms, academic aspirations, and community dynamics.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The participants comprised teachers, learners, parents and local leaders in the districts of Chiradzulu, Mulanje and Thyolo districts. All teachers from the three schools were graduates. Parents educational background ranged from Junior Certificate to school certificate, while local traditional leaders, educational background was below school certificate. The age range of teachers, parents and local traditional leaders was twenty five to sixty years while that of learners was twelve to seventeen. Of the fifty six participants, eighteen were girls, eighteen boys, five female teachers, seven male teachers, three male local traditional leaders, two female parents and two male parents all residents of Chiradzulu, Mulanje and Thyolo.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	4	14
	Female	24	86
	Total	24	100
Age	10-12	1	3.6
	12-15	21	75
	16-18	6	21.4
	Total	28	100
Level of the study	Form 2	8	28.6
	Form 3	4	14.3
	Form 4	16	57.1

To be noted were the areas of jurisdiction of participants with the exception of the learners that was consideration of the learners. That was considered important because it served to show the level of authority each one had. The schools were under the jurisdiction of head teachers, the DEMs have all schools in the districts under their jurisdictions, the EDM had all the region under its jurisdictions, parents and teachers had all learners under their jurisdiction and lastly, chiefs/ local traditional leaders had all households under their jurisdiction in the village.

For security, the researcher had made use of pseudo names to refer to some respondents such as learners, parents and local traditional leaders. The title or teacher A, teacher B and teacher C e.t.c, had also been used to refer to teachers as respondents such as learners, parents and local traditional leaders. The title as teacher A, teacher B and teacher C etc had also been used to refer to teachers as respondents arranged according to the sequence of the specific school under study. The implication was that teacher A was the teacher of the first school to participate in this study and so on and so forth.

4.1 Context of the Study Area

Chiradzulu, Mulanje and Thyolo were chosen study areas with five specific locations sampled using convenient sampling. Accounting to Malawi standard, locations in Chiradzulu, Mulanje, and Thyolo districts could be grouped into two, semi – urban and rural. Using the convenient sampling, the location under study could be grouped into one, the semi urban. The specific locations were labeled X, Y and Z according to the square in which the study was under taken. No typical rural area was targeted in this respect.

MAIN FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings of the study in line with themes generated after coding and categorization in analysis

4.2.1 Theme: Reputation

The way in which an organization is perceived by internal and external stakeholders is known as the reputation and is a popular research subject since it was emerged. Schools have a sort of reputation, but they include some different components than any other organization, the level of school reputation could differ according to some parameters such as school type, location or economic profile of students and their parents. The most significant result was that especially in Secondary School academic success and graduate profiles are the most and in some cases the only component of reputation. Head teachers are the responsible for the reputation of the schools. Schools are responsible for building future and that can only be done with good reputation. For good reputation to be achieved there must be good interaction and one of the work important outputs of these interactional was the term public relations because organizations both effect and are effected by the environment with which they had to interact. All these interactions and final products of the so called process have ended with perceptions of the society in which schools had to survive, (Deputy Head teacher of boys school).

The local leader of some location of boy's school had this to add:

“Single sex school choice is influenced by the reputation and medium of instruction, parents believe that single sex school have all the resources and students can need in his/her education and this makes students to pass examinations with good grades, further than that parents believe that in single sex schools, students learn good morals which lead

them to be good future leaders in their societies, work place and anywhere they can go”.
(Local Leader X1, 2024)

While agreeing with the local leader as well as Deputy Head teacher, that single sex schools produce good results, a lady parent from boys location school. This is how she put; “To me, I believe that single sex school makes students to finish secondary education with good grades. Additional to that, most student from single sex schools end up being enrolled in various public universities whereby they end up by getting a good job, unlike in mixed sex schools where students do not pass with good grades”.

The single school choice was also shared by a Form Three boy from a boy’s school who said:

“I am very happy to be at this school because I have all the chances of acquiring good points at National examinations. This is possible because of the reputation of the school thus the hardworking teachers, good teaching and learning resources, and availability of all subjects which a student can select comfortably. I have a friend who is at Balaka Secondary School, he always admired me for being at a single sex school as well as National Secondary School, which he always says your place is there at university, what remains is for you to complete the Mission” (Student X3,2024)

These remarks were also shared by a male teacher from a girl’s school who said:

“Other parents choice of single school takes into account the location of the school convenience or proximity. It is believed that most single sex schools are located in good areas which are very accessible by both the school students and guardians. This is contrary to mixed sex schools which are located in the rural areas”. (Teacher X5, 2024)

4.1.4 Theme: Risky Behavior

Risky behaviors are anything which may put students at risk of physical, mental, emotional harm or abuse. This covers a range of things such as abusing drugs or alcohol, criminal or anti- social behavior, hate or knife crime and also risky sexual behavior, smoking, and cigarette smoking. Six risky situations to which the youth are frequently exposed include: Gangs, drugs, sex, alcohol, Indian hemp, buying and unsupervised access to the internet.

Risk taking behavior occurs because students made a decision to engage in risky behavior. These and other reasons could lead to greater involvement in risk taking behaviors include but not limited to: Youths are frequently exposed to the risk of experimenting with drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Peer pressure, curiosity, and societal influences could lead them to try these substances which could have severe consequences on their physical and mental health; Online dangers, with the increased use of technology, youths are exposed to various risks while using the internet. These include cyber bullying, online predators, phishing attempts, scams and many others that exposure to explicit or inappropriate contents which means without proper guidance young people can fall victim to these dangers,

Youths often face risk situations in their romantic relationships. This can include emotional or physical abuse, coercive behavior, control or manipulation from their partners.

Some youth faced the risk of joining gangs due to various factors such as a lack of positive role models, socioeconomic challenges or a desire for belonging and protection. Involvement in gang activities exposed them to violence, criminal behaviors, substances abuse, and a higher likelihood of encountering legal troubles and vandalism. It is crucial to provide education support and resources to help youths navigate these risky situations and make informed decisions. All that have been said above do not happen in single sex schools but they are common in co-educational schools and because of these unwelcome activities, parents prefer single sex schools to co-educational schools (Teacher of boys and girls school). To conclude, risky behaviors, are common in mixed sex schools which destroy student's future opportunities and that is why most parents disliked co-educational schools.

The learner from girl's school echoed the above words when she said:

"I am happy to be at this school because we are not in touch with boys who can distract us with bad behaviour such as smoking, chamba, and alcohol drinking. Teasing and bullying, vandalism and sexual activities which can lead to school dropout which lead to distraction of future opportunities (Ivy)" (Student X2, 2024)

4.1.5 Theme: Teaching and Learning Resources

Teaching and learning resources were one of the factors that influenced parents to send their child to single sex schools. Good teaching can result in increased motivation leading to good study

habits and good grades. Students might become interested in learning and develop positive attitudes towards education this increases future opportunities, self-esteem, and good academic and career success.

On the contrary, poor teaching can result in

“Lack of motivation leading to bad study habit and poor grades, students may become disinterested in learning and developing negative attitudes towards education. That limits future opportunities, self-esteem impact and career success”. (Lady Teacher from girl’s school).

Also agreeing with that lady teacher above, a female parent whose child was at mixed sex school said this:

“We parents believe that in single sex schools, teachers play a crucial role in shaping student academic success. Good teachers in single sex schools are expected to be knowledgeable, supportive and skilled communicator. They not only impart knowledge but also create a positive learning environment that motivates students”. (Teacher X2, 2024).

Still on the teaching and learning resources, a learner from a boy’s school had this to say:

“Studies and learning at this school are good because the school has enough number of qualified teachers for every subject. Teachers are very supportive through remedial lessons and also the school has all the resources for every subject. This is contrary to mixed sex schools which sometimes have no enough teachers. Text books, computers, poor diet and poor hostels. This forced parents to prefer single sex schools to mixed sex schools” (Student X5, 2024).

Traditional local leaders from the location of girls’ school had this to say:

“Because of good results that we see at the end of national examinations, we are always impressed that single sex schools have a good number of qualified teachers, teachers who work hard and give all the support to learners. We also believed and got convinced that single sex schools have all the teaching and learning resources one can think of Local Leader X2, 2024)”.

Agreeing on the statements above parents whose child was at mixed sex school had this to say.

“I do not like mixed sex schools because of poor results of national examinations. These poor results are due to; teaching which include inadequate training, insufficient resources and large class sizes and the fact that many teachers received limited or inadequate training which can impact their ability to effectively teach students. Teachers might not have skills or knowledge necessary to help students understand complex concepts or provides personalized support”

4.1.6 Theme: Teasing and Bullying

Teasing and bullying is one of the unwelcomed activities taking place in schools worldwide including Malawi. Research has been found that there is more teasing and bullying taking place in mixed sex schools than in single sex schools. Because of its negative consequences, most parents dislike mixed sex schools and prefer single sex schools where there is no teasing and bullying or there is less teasing and bullying.

One teacher from mixed sex schools had this to say:

“Students who are bullied show less academic improvement due to fear of standing out. As a result teachers often identify those students as low achievers or unmotivated learners. These students might then receive less attention from teachers which only pushes them further down the academic rankings in their schools (Teacher X5, 2024)”.

The deputy Head teacher of boy’s school echoed the above words when he said;

“Bullying is becoming an increasingly prevalent problem in modern public schools, but how exactly does it affect a child’s academic performance is little known. While many people assume that a little bit of bullying is harmless, it might even be helpful for the child to teach them how to stick up for themselves. In reality however, a large estimated number of children miss school on any given day due to fear of bullying by other students. Everyday a large number of students are physically attacked in school and one out of ten students who dropped out of school mentions repeated bullying as a factor”. (Head Teacher X2, 2024).

The deputy Head teacher of a girl’s school also confirmed this as he related that:

“Bullying can have serious impact on child’s educational experience, and not just by counting him/her to miss school. Students who are repeatedly bullied receive poor grades

and participate less in class discussions. Students might be mislabeled as low achievers because they do not want to speak up in class for Fear of getting bullied .Once learners are labeled as “dumb, they get picked on and perform even worse. This student receives less attention from teachers which only pushes them further down the academic ranking in their schools. These students see the school as unsafe place”. (Head Teacher X2, 2024)

Agreeing on this issue of teasing and bullying, a girl from a mixed sex school had this to say:

“We, the Form Ones are assigned various tasks by our seniors thus the Form 2, Form 3 and Form 4. Such tasks include washing clothes, washing plates soon after lunch and dinner; the seniors take and wear our clothes, during visitor’s day, all things brought by our guardians they take them. Once we refuse or deny what they ask us to do they beat us, wet out beddings and threaten to kill us once we report to our Form Teachers” (Student, X10, 2024)

Synthesizing the issues of teasing and bullying a factor, forced parents to like single sex school where there is no teasing and bullying or less bullying compared to coeducation schools.

4.1.7 Theme: School Credentials

Another factor which influences parents to send their children to school is school credentials.

“Education credentials means degrees, diplomas, certificates, transcripts, reports or documents that signify satisfactory completion of the requirements or prerequisites for any educational programme (Teacher X4, 2024).

“Examples of credentials are educational degrees such as doctoral degrees (PLD, Dr PH, DNS, EdD, DNP), Master degree, (MSN, Ms. MA) bachelor’s degrees (Bs, BsN, BA) and associate degrees (AD, ADM (licensure credentials include, RN and LPN. (Teacher from boys school, (Teacher X4, 2024).

Also in support of this statement was the female parent whose child was at a girls school and she said this; Agreed to the issue of school credentials, female learners for girl schools had this to say:

“Single sex schools are better than mixed sex schools in terms of credentials. In single sex schools, students have all the opportunities of reaching up to university level where they can end up by getting certificates, diplomas, degrees thus the first degree, masters and PHD these will enable them to be big bosses in various organizations (Head Teacher, H2,2024)”.

Concurring with the same issues is the traditional local leader who said this: “Most single sex schools create a placement of students in a society. There is recognition of people who went through single sex schools.

These people are recognized because of a good paper, good behaviors and hard work in the society (Chief, C1, 2024).

4.1.8 Theme: Functioning Community

Functioning community was yet another factor which influenced most parents to send their children to single sex school, especially Mulanje and Chiradzulu districts.

Local traditional leader of the location of girls school had this to say on functioning community:

“A community is a social unit with commonalities such as place, norms, culture, religious, customs or identity and values.

Learners /people who went through single sex school have good behaviors, as such; they respect the values of the society and their norms. They take part in preserving the culture and customs of the society. Further, this knowledge gained from single sex schools is used in the developmental projects taking place in their respective communities. This is possible because most of the single sex schools are church owned schools where good morals are strictly taught/prayers are encouraged and hard work is the spirit of such schools.

The community has the following functions:

“Production, distribution and consumption: The functioning community provides all its members with the means to make a living in order to help it existing. Not only does it do that but through also Socialization where the functioning community has all the means

through which it manages to instill norms, such as use of appropriate language and behavior and respecting the community. The functioning community has all the means to enhance adherence to community values, customs and culture (Local Leader, 2024)”.

As regards the issue, male parent from the location of co-educational school had this to say;

“A part from the academic performance, also single sex schools prepare a child for later life (functioning community) in future civic participation and fulfill the potential of the child in the community. The increasing enrolment into single sex school is an indication of the assertion that parents are seeking schools which promote the idea of a “functioning community “(Chibalo, the parent)”.

4.1.9 Theme: Social Norms

Social norms as a factor also influenced parents to send their children to single sex schools.

On that issue, lady teachers of girls schools had this to say;

“Single sex school students are very polite and with good morals. They are always on time when preparing for school and classes. This helps them to develop good time management skills for life and careers.

They dress in school uniform daily indicating the adherence of school rules and regulations and that is very important when they grow up. Students at single sex schools most of the time use appropriate language and behavior. And may be, this is due to the fact that most of these schools are owned by mission which emphasize good morals and behaviours and that is significant because such students become good citizens in the society.

Single sex school students always take positive approach to teaching and learning and may be this is why students from these schools pass national examinations with good grades. Students from single sex schools respect school environments. Cases of strike, violence; vandalism and destruction of other school facilities are very rare and may be this is because such students are always in touch with reverends, pastors, brothers and sisters/nuns. That is very important because

students will respect the culture, norms, customs and values of their community when they grow up.

“Church owned single sex schools, students are encouraged to go to church for prayers each and every morning and this instils good morals and behavior which help them to have the spirit of respecting one another”.

Agreeing to that, a learner from a boy school said this;

“Single sex school like this has a good reputation because of adherence to school rules and regulations. Further than that punctuality is emphasized and because of that punctuality, everything is done on time ranging from (time for breakfast, tea, lunch and dinner) (time for class lessons, we do not miss a lesson because of time factors. Time for other activities are accomplished with time scheduled, and that is why this school is amongst schools which are on the map in Malawi.

4.1.10 Theme: Peer Pressure

Most parents sent their children to single sex schools because there is no or less peer pressure in single sex schools compared to mixed sex schools.

The Deputy Head teacher of mixed sex schools had this to say:

“Peer pressure is a process by which members of the same social group influenced other members to do things that they may be resistant to or might not otherwise choose to do. Peers are people of equal standing with another equal. The band mates welcomed the new members of a peer, especially one belonging to the same social group especially based on age, grade or state, teenagers spending time with their peers”.

Agreeing to this, a student from coeducation school who was once suspended had this to say:

“Negative peer pressure is often related to influencing “bullying behavior, drinking, alcohol, drug use and negative body image, all of these are harmful to a child or young person wellbeing. The effect of such behaviors can decrease self- confidence, self-worth and distancing from family members and friends”.

“I was suspended for three weeks because of stealing. I had a girl friend who was demanding a lot of things from me like money for cosmetics, money for groceries and even money for clothes that made me to be a thief so that I could satisfy her. But at the end, I was caught and suspended for three weeks. But after returning back, I joined a good company that was a company of SCOM whereby most of the time we could discuss God and school work, and nothing else” (student).

Negative peer pressure is suspected for luring students to engage in negative habits such as over drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and marijuana, sexually related activities and other socially unacceptable acts that destruct them from their studies.

A lady teacher from a single sex school had also this to say:

“In single sex schools, peer pressure does have some positive aspect – for example, conforming to safe and healthy behavior and peers influencing academic achievement.

However, negative peer pressure is often related to influencing bullying behavior, drinking alcohol, drug use and negative body image all of which are harmful to the child or young people’s wellbeing. The effects of such behavior can decrease self- confidence, self –worth”. Research uncovered that there is direct positive correlation between peer pressure and depression at its worth can lead to social ideation, self- harm and other harmful behavior. Research further stated that the presence of peer pressure is a predictor for an increase in stress level, ability and sleep issues. Social media added a significant dimension to peer pressure. It meant that a young person peer group had continued access to them, outside the normal school days, peer pressure related posts may include images of vandalistic lifestyle or body images (for example, using image filters) sky behavior and alcohol and drug use. So, these are very common in co-education schools unlike in single sex schools. Peer pressure can manifest in various signs among children and young people, including frequent school absences, declining academic performance, noticeable behavioral changes around specific friend groups, experimentation with unhealthy habits like smoking, engagement in risky or criminal behaviors, bullying tendencies, and substance abuse. These behaviors often indicate the influence of peer dynamics on students' choices and actions.

As educators, there are several effective strategies to support students facing peer pressure. Establishing a safe and open communication environment within classrooms or designated school

spaces is crucial, where students feel comfortable discussing their concerns and seeking assistance when needed. Modeling healthy communication by sharing personal experiences of peer pressure can help students understand effective ways to handle similar situations. Encouraging students to set boundaries and practice assertiveness in refusing negative influences, through role-playing and group discussions, can empower them to make informed choices. Developing plans with students for managing peer pressure scenarios and emphasizing the importance of independence and self-respect also equips them with valuable skills to navigate challenging social dynamics confidently.

Another parent who has a child at co- education institution had this to say:

“My son’s behaviour is highly affected because of the dependency to others; hence in school most of students who have indiscipline have adapted the behaviour of others and are mostly persuaded to an act by the others.

As such, my son’s academic performance have gone down due to several factors such as beer drinking, smoking marijuwana, stealing, open defiance to teachers as well as shaking. I once asked the teacher to punish him severely but that did not work, and I do not believe that he will finish secondary education before being called off.”

“The Head teacher reached the point of telling me that apart from my son being sucked, he could also ended in police custody because of his theft practices”.

So such behaviors are common in co-education schools, and not in single sex schools (Scott, 2012). Another cause of peer pressure is teacher non-adoption of verbal reinforcement strategy, poor attitude of teachers to their job, lack of qualified teachers and poor style of teaching. The poor academic performance could also be attributed to student factors such as inability of students to manage their time, poor preparation, inability to withhold peer pressure and seriousness of students towards their academic endeavors.

4.1.11 Theme: Discrimination

Another factor that influenced parents to send their children to single sex schools was discrimination. Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and group based on characteristics as race, gender, age or sexual orientation.

Deputy Head teacher of single sex schools had this to say;

“Discrimination is more hazardous since it is more pervasive than people realize it. However, that has come from a long way thus the way people raise their children differ within culture, religions, ethnicity, economic condition and educational starting. After all it might be different not only from community to community and family to family, but also individual household to household. Sometimes children under the same roof are discriminated based on their gender. Based on total of purposively parents discriminate son and daughter in terms of providing better education facilities.

But United Nations millennium Development goals (MDGS) are the eight goals set by the 189 UN member states in September 2000 and agreed to be achieved by the year 2015 (Mc Arthur, 2014). Nepal is also one who has committed to achieve millennium Development goals. (Gender quality and empowerment of women is one of the eight goals that needed to be achieved by 2015. National Planning Commission, (2016) realizing the right to education of basic human rights. Environment has been concentrated and focused on formation of plans and policies to promote girls education to achieve gender equality.

Another teacher from mixed schools had this to say:

“Discrimination is different and infant treatments. You could be discriminated against because of just about anything from the colour of your hair to the clothes you wear. But it is unfair to discriminate because of age, disability, sex and sex orientation, race and religion.

“Discrimination can be direct when you are treated in a particular way because of your age, disability or sex Discrimination can be “indirect” when something (Riterion in practice) applies to everyone but in practice it is harder for some people to comply with that because of their age disability or sex etc.

An example of direct discrimination would be not letting someone on a schools trip because they are disabled. This would be direct discrimination on grounds of disability.

An example of indirect discrimination would not letting someone go on a school trip because they did not have a particular level of attendance at school and the reason they hadn't been at school was related to their disability. However at school level, teachers favor boys than girls because of

the mindset that girls will be women and get married which will end up to be submission to their husband” .

Agreed to that, another parent whose daughter was at a single sex school had this to say:

“I dislike co-education school because teachers at co- education school take girls as slow learners and they do not encourage girls to work hard instead, they say abusive words towards girls.

Some teachers propose sexual relationships, once the girls refuse them they end up in failing them during examinations. Most parents believed that single sex schools are good for girls and co-education schools are good for boys”.

It was also argued that lack of professionalism is another challenge encountered by girls in co-education school as they are trying to climb their education ladder; there are reported cases of battering which makes some learners to withdraw from school. Furthermore some teachers in co-education schools psychologically abuse some female learners either by calling them names or collecting them in the presence of boys whenever they had make a mistakes.

4.1.12 Theme: Leadership Skills

As stated earlier that single sex schools are schools that provide education to boys only or girls only in separate classes or schools.

The lady teacher of girl schools had this to say;

“Single sex schools, especially girl school promotes leadership skills in areas like Head prefects, sports prefect, sanitation and entertainment whereby these positions could have been handled by boys in co-educational schools. Addition to that, girl schools promote girls to be public speakers in any gathering like during assembly, girls are able to speak publicly without fear or being ashamed of the boys”.

Agreed to that, a male teacher of a boy school said this;

“Single sex school eliminates competition between boys and girls. The reason behind, single gender classroom is the belief that girls and boys are different neurologically and learn very differently neurologically. (According to a study of how the Brain learns: New and exciting presented Dr. Sousa in 2014.ASAIHL Conference in Singapore. Boys develop

visual, Spatial and temporal skills faster than girls and girls acquire spoken language skills faster than boys. In a single gender school, girls get to explore their skills at their own pace without having to compete with boys and vice versa.”

Another male teacher from co- education school had also said this:

“Single sex schools helped teacher to adapt methods while in a co-education is difficult to cater to every one’s need, it is easier to prepare the learning needs of a single gender class. Usually, boys understand more through physical activities while girls prefer interactions and discussions. According to a study “

with boys and girls in mind by Michael Gurian and Kathy Stewens published in Educational leadership in 2004, classrooms based on gender promote different skills and make learning more relatable. The study states

“New PET Scan and MRI technologies reveal structural and functional differences in the brains of boys and girls with more cortical areas denoted to verbal functioning sensual memory, sitting still listening, quality and mental cross talk the complicities of reading and writing come easier to the female. Boys lateralize their thinking, need rest states to recharge and use more cortical of their brains for spatial mechanical functioning. (Classrooms that help girls learn will promote gross motor skills, encourage perceptual learning and use the manipulative to teach Mathematics. Boys – friendly classrooms will promote fine motor skills provided ample space to move around and make lessons experiential and kinesthetic.

4.1.13 Theme: Family Social Class

Another factor that influenced parents to send their children to single sex schools is financial status of the parents.

One local traditional leader had this to comment:

“It has been noted that, parents who choose single sex schooling, on average have more money and more education which all predict performance; so if you find that the students are performing better, you do not know if it is due to the single sex education or the fact that they started out with these advantages.

However, it is argued that single gender learning environment benefits girls by increasing confidence which in turn, builds leadership capabilities.

“If you look around the room, which’s going to be the student body, president? It is going to be a female. Who is going to lead an after school club? It is going to be a female.”

4.1.14: Theme: Repetition

Girls grow faster than boys because of that, parents dislike sending their children to co-educational school because of repeating a class, especially girls because of the product of sexual relationships.

A coeducation secondary teacher had these views;

“Parents fear of overage for grade which is associated with earlier pregnancy and marriage. Studies have shown that despite girls performing better than boys and more boys being sexually active than girls at earlier ages. Girls experienced moral policing in schools and are likely to repeat a grade, face disciplinary action or be suspended by school authorities for being in a relationship or getting pregnant. Parents who feared the possibility of school girl pregnancy might also withdraw their daughters from co-education schools”.

A lady teacher of girl’s school had this to say:

“ Most of the school choice has focus on across the family differences, there is evidence that parents also evaluate schools differently depending upon the gender of their child (David, 1997, Jackson & Bisset, 2005), and that boys and girls of secondary school age evaluate schools differently (Hastings, Kane, & Stanger, 2006). For instance parents of girls prefer same sex schools; whereas parents of boys tend to consider other school resources such as the facilities (Jackson & Bisses, 2004).

Although most of the school choice has focuses on across family differences, there is some evidence that parents also evaluate schools differently depending upon the gender of their child (David,1997) Jackson & Bisset 2005) and that boys and girls of Secondary school age evaluate school differently (Hastings, Kane & Stanger 2006). For example, parents of girls prefer same sex schools whereas parents of boys tend to consider other school resource such as the facilities.

Single sex education is more frequently reported as an important factor affecting school choice decision among parents of girl whereas preference for co-educational schooling is more frequently reported by parents of boys. In the realm of education provision the professional culture of intellectual enquiry and debate in education had been “usurped” by an institutional stress on performativity, often evidenced by emphasis on measured outputs such as performance indicator, quality assurance and academic audits (Oissen & Peters, 2007). In that neoliberal paradigm, young people had to chase credentials to gain security in future education or work place (Lakes & Carter, 2011; Jackson & Bisset, 2005).

4.1.16: Theme: Lack of Professionalism of Teachers

A teacher also called as an educator is a person who helps students to acquire knowledge, competence, or virtue via teaching. It is well known that the quality and extent of learner achievement are determined primarily by teacher competence, sensitivity and teacher motivation. Other scholars define a teacher as a person who helps others to acquire knowledge, competences or values. Teacher is a designation for the office position and profession for someone who devotes himself in the field of education through patterned educational interactions, formal and systematic. On the contrary to that, parents send their children to single sex schools because they believed that some teachers, especially male teachers, found in co- educational schools display unprofessional behavior’s towards students.

A male teacher from a co- education secondary school had this to comment;

“There are teachers who attempt in the classroom and foster a hostile environment for a student or even an entire class. Behaviors such as making fun of students, breeching the bond of trust with a student and calling student’s names that are poor role modeling and often manifest into larger issues. So parents dislike this.”

“Unprofessional behavior such as being verbally or physically abusive to students is both un professional and immoral. With these attitudes, teachers cannot be respected by students, sometimes these teachers are rude, fail to provide adequate support and even allow students to bully other students”.

Agreed to that a parent of student of co-education had this to witness:

“My girl child was doing well when she was in Form One, upon reaching Form Two, then her progress was deteriorating /her grades were suffering. After asking her what was the problem with her poor performance she simply kept quiet. But after pressing her, it was when she disclosed that the poor grades were coming because the male teacher of English and Biology asked her for a sexual relationship and she refused. From that day, the teacher was always violent and aggressive towards her, this scenario forced me to visit the Head teacher of the school for assistance, but it did not work. So, out of frustrations, I found her a place at a single sex school which is Our Lady of Wisdom in Blantyre”.

Another local traditional leader had this to say:

“Lack of professionalism is also part of the challenges that is encountered by girls as they try to climb their educational ladder. It has been found out that there are reported cases of battering which made some female learners withdraw from school. It is also unearthed that the fact that some girls pulled out of simply because they had been battered at certain location, additional to that some teachers psychologically abused some female learners either by calling them names or by correcting them in public whenever they had made mistakes. This was quite unfortunate”.

4.1.16 Theme: Indiscipline in Mixed Sex Schools

Another factor which influences parents to send their children to single sex schools is discipline which is emphasized and observed in single sex schools than in co-education schools. In discipline is the order of the day in most of the co-educational schools. The teacher of the co- educational schools had this to say about the meaning of indiscipline:

“There are so many examples of indiscipline cases in Secondary School such as smoking, beer drinking, love and sexual relationships, boycotting of lessons, watching and practicing pornography, telling lies, violence, dishonesty, indiscipline to teachers,

prefects and school administration, bullying, stealing, absenteeism and defiance of authority, are more widely spread in co- education secondary schools than in single sex schools. This makes parents to prefer single sex schools to co- educational schools”.

The teacher of co-education had this to say on the negative effects of indiscipline at Secondary school as follows:

“Loss of property such as destruction of buildings like classrooms, desks, charts, and other teaching and learning materials. Other effects include injuries and loss of lives when student set fire on buildings like hostels. In addition to that there is an increase in the rate of school drop-out”.

Agreeing with that, another teacher of boy’s school had this to say:

“Some effects of Indiscipline in secondary schools included; laziness, truancy, delinquency, cheating and disobedience in schools are contributory factors to academic performance of senior secondary school students. The schools with rampant discipline problems, the teachers are demotivated and un resourceful. This affects the academic performance of students and that contributes to the poor performance of the child which tarnishes the school image and teachers efficiency”.

Adding to that, a co-education student who was once suspended from school because of indiscipline issues had this to say:

“I was suspended with my five friends for doing the following; bullying the form ones for no approved reason, stealing, preventing the Form Ones to go to the dining hall when that day there was meat. But what made us to be suspended was that we were found at the dark corner doing sexual activities”.

So, looking at those awkward things that are common in co-education schools, parents prefer single sex schools to co –education schools.

4.1.17 Theme: Academic Success

Most parents send their children to single sex schools because they believe that in single sex schools there is high academic success than in co- education schools. This seemed to be true as this single sex school teacher said this;

“Single sex class help to break down stereotypes that the co-educational classroom may inadvertently reinforce. For example, the stereotypical thinking that girls do not perform as well as boys in Math and Science may cause girls to hold back in those subjects or not take those subjects for fear of under achieving”.

There are factors that make single sex schools better than mixed sex schools which include students achieving higher averages and therefore, a higher education rate, an increase in opportunities and advantages based on sex, an increase in self- confidence and finally less distraction from the other sex. And there is research to back this up. Analysis by the Girls Schools Association in (2021) of data published by the Departments for Education from 2018 – 2019 released that when compared to peer at co- educational schools, pupils at girls school were twice as likely to take Math. A level and 2.5 times as likely to take math and physics. They were also more likely to take a level in other STEM subjects. The same research reported better levels of academic attachment at all girls’ schools compared with co-educational schools” (Mr. Khonje).

Concurring with respondent, a parent whose girl child was at a girls school had this to say:

“Girls in particular benefit from a single sex education, they participate more in class, develop much higher self- esteem, score higher in aptitude tests, are more likely to choose male disciplines, such as science in secondary and college and they are more successful in their careers. Where as in co- educational schools, boys and girls distract each other from their education, especially in adolescence as their sexual and emotional sides develop. Too much time can be spent attempting to impress or harass each other (Particularly boys toward girls). Academic competition between the sexes is unhealthy and only adds unhappiness and anxiety among the weaker students”.

A co-education secondary school teacher had this to comment:

“Single sex school performs better than co-educational school because single sex school institutions make it easier for children to stay comfortable and focused on school work. Single sex institutions ensure that they place a lot of emphasis on this aspect as it encourages better learning in students.

Today, students in single sex schools could stand to gain more confidence (both academically and personally) and achieve more in the scope of their college and career ambitions compared to their peers in co-educational schools. In single sex schools, students are often more willing to take risks and enjoy new challenges, because they do not fear failing or floundering in front of the other sex. Single sex graduates have even rated themselves having higher levels of intellectual self – confidence, an attitude that is crucial for college and life success”.

Agreeing with this is a boy from co-education school who had this to say:

“Our friends in single sex schools perform better than us because their environment is free from distractions. For instance, there is no love and sexual relationship which can distract them from studies”.

4.1.17 Theme: Self Esteem

Self- esteem was another factor that influenced parents to send their children to single sex schools.

“Self- esteem refers to person evaluation of his / her work. The best known form is global self- esteem: general dispositional and consciously accessible self- evaluation psychologists have argued that self- esteem is important because it signs how well accepted of culturally valued one is (Phiri, a teacher)”.

The establishment of single sex schools had been used to improve girl academic performance so that girls can gain inner self confidence. Single sex- schools create equal opportunities and challenges for the children, especially in co-curricular activities such as sports, and clubs. In sports activities, children can challenge their peers and not the opposite gender who might be stronger due to biological build. Single sex education creates a comfortable learning environment. Single sex education and single sex institutions make it easier for children to stay comfortable and focused on school work. Single sex institutions ensure that they place a lot of emphasis on this aspect as it encourages better learning in children.

Children do not have to worry about how to behave or what to say because of the presence of the other gender. They have fewer worries about the appearance. This advantage is more evident in all girl schools, where girls do not have to feel subconscious, need to impress boys or anything of that nature. They don't have to have to feel weird or awkward for dressing particular way or talking about heartfelt situations. Children can enjoy total freedom and relaxation whenever they are in school.

Single sex schools have lesser comparison. It is very uncommon in mixed schools for male children to be compared to their female counterparts or the other way round. It might be in the rules and regulations of school for that not to happen, however, it can be challenging to strictly enforce that, especially among the children. Single sex schools also create equal opportunities and challenges for the children, especially in co-curricular activities such as sports activities, children can challenge their peers and not the opposite gender, who may be stronger due to biological build. They are encouraged to be their best at all times.

Some of the subjects like Mathematics and Sciences had been highly performed by one gender and not the other. By being in a single sex school, "the students can strive hard since they have more confidence. Boys on the other hand can participate in areas that require expression of emotions. Furthermore, single sex education promotes leadership skills in children especially girls. Girls who are in co-education schools are not" (teacher of a girl a school said).

Echoed to that, one traditional leader said this:

"If you want your daughter to be high flying business woman or banker, send her to single sex schools". New research concluded consistency in relationship between gender and education styles. Single gender classes perform better when separated in their pre-teens. It is not only the religion aspect of education, it is a proven fact that girls and boys learn differently. They have different physical and emotional needs to learn successfully. For many years, in many cultures, single gender schooling is advocated on the basis of tradition as well as religion, and is practiced in many parts of the world. Recently, there has been a great deal of evidence to suggest boys and girls behave and respond differently

learning styles. Supporters believe that single gender school aids student outcomes difficulties related to hormonal and emotional maturity”.

It is said that lot of time, students who attend single sex schools are better educated, more, confident in their abilities, and over all better prepared to enter the outside world after leaving high school, especially females. While this argument might be true, it is also obvious that students of co-education are better adjusted when it comes to social aspects with the opposite sex that is also a big part of life after high school. These days women and men majority of the time work together in the work place. As women continue to take on more prominent roles outside the home, the ability to successfully work together becomes increasingly important. Both co-education schools and single sex schools have their advantages and disadvantages, but overall the advantages and benefits of attending a single sex school outweigh the disadvantages tremendously. Single sex schools provide students with understanding of their capabilities and skills, making them the best option in terms of most aspects. In co-educational schools, many things can factor into destructing students such as opposite sex/gender, cliques and peer pressure. It is shown that destructions such as those who are more prevalent in co-educational schools. With girls, they do not have to worry about things such as impressing boys which is common concern for many middle and high school students. With boys, they do not have to live up to a certain standard in order to feel cool, or try to impress girls. This result in lesser cliques being formed and the boys becoming nicer to their peers instead. In single sex schools, there is room for types of people of that gender which lessens the destruction.

Echoing that a girl from girl’s school had this to say:

“Single sex schools offer a number benefits over co-educational schools, for one thing, they allow for open discussions on gender specific issues and more tailored curriculum. Single sex schools encourage a more relaxed environment that allows students to excel in academics without the pressure being judged by opposite sex”.

Another parent who had a child at a co-education school had this comment:

“Single sex education has become increasingly popular for good reasons. It has many benefits for students. Many believed that it is a new frontier into a greater future for students and the world. Students and parents alike to lean towards single sex education because of its effects on students future such as higher college acceptance and attendance, better education and less gender intensification”.

“Equally, there is a big factor in the opposition of single education. But the strongest argument against single sex education is the reduction of boys and girls to work together, and reinforces sex stereotypes. However, there is no scientific evidence that support the idea that single sex schooling results in better academic outcomes and single sex schooling has no real effect on students and statistics are usually unclear. This shows a tough argument for single sex education. However, having boys and/girls around is not the most important factor in education. In fact, boys in classroom are actually a setback. All girl schools are more advantageous than co-educational schools because there are fewer destruction, girls have higher self-esteem, socially and academically successful”.

4.1.18: Theme: Drop Out Rate

Education is on the top basic human rights that grantees children and adolescents to develop and acquire the knowledge and skills required to realize their full potentials and participate actively in their society. UNICEF (2017), the fourth goal of Sustainable Development asks for all girls and boys to have access to free, equitable and high quality primary and secondary education by 2030, resulting in relevant and effective learning outcomes. To accomplish this goal, it is critical that each child completes his/her education without dropping. According to UNICEF (2017), School dropout is defined as leaving school before completing an educational cycle or programmes that has already begun. Students at risk of dropping out are those that are registered in any mandatory programme but are exhibiting risk factors or symptoms that indicate they might drop out.

“Building a system to early predict students at risk of school dropout or being able to characterize the main determinants of this problem in advance could help in reducing its negative social and economic implications. It also might help to provide policy makers with a guidance so as to eradicate the causes of this social behavior over years”.

A parent of co-educational girl child concurring with (Gubbels et al, 2019; Rahaman & Das 2018) said this:

“Most parents/guardians dislike dropouts because dropouts are often less motivated educationally, and commonly have complex psychological and behavioural issues that put them in danger. Consequently, the dropout issue is upsetting and poses a threat to successfully completing schooling as well as attaining the overall objectives of education. As a result, it is crucial to determine the causes of dropout to provide policy makers with guidance so as to eradicate this social behaviour overtime and to address the issue of unifying basic education that is required of all students”.

Agreeing with the above statement, a local traditional leader said this:

“However, there are some factors such as student chronic diseases, co-educational, parent illiteracy, educational performance and teacher caring can make students vulnerable to dropping out. As a result, it is important for policy makers and or school administrators to take prompt action and attention to these features which can help to resolve these issues earlier on. This could assist in preventing many students from quitting school”.

Again on the above issue, female teacher from co-educational school concurring with Ibidi Said this:

“Dropping out is more of a process than an event; for many years students, the process begins in early elementary school. A number of long-term studies that tracked groups of students from preschool or early elementary school through the end of high school were able to identify early indicators that could significantly predict whether students were likely to dropout or finish high school. The two most consistent indicators were early academic performance and social behaviours. This is quite related to findings where some local leaders bemoaned the fact that their wards were unable to continue with school because they could not match the demand. The more they tried the more they failed. Feelings of frustrations generated the thoughts of dropping out”.

So, from the participants, parents prefer single sex schools because there is less or no dropout rate.

4.1.19 Helping Spirit in Single Sex Schools

Teacher of a girl school had this to say:

“It is believed that girls do well when they are working and helping one another in groups which help them to be successful. This helping spirit is not common in co-educational schools where learners are always competing against one another and this is common between boys and girls in co-educational schools”.

In the same vein, a co-educational school girl had this to say:

“Boys have no spirit of helping girls for free, instead they fee being stars when they are in the presence of girls. So to me, single sex schools are good because students work together and yield academic and social advantages for us girls. Even most teachers believe that compared to male learners, female learners perform better and are more engaged and responsive to different learning situations. It is also found out that there are statistically significant differences between both genders in terms of the effects of socio-cultural environment, self-efficacy and the learning environment”.

Agreeing to the above comments, parents of single sex school girls had this to say:

“Female learners are better than male learners in mono-gender schools, and they have higher self-efficacy than male students at the secondary school”.

However, this parent agreed with Evance (2014) by saying that

“Mixed gender classes help learners understand the similarities and attitudes of opposite gender in a classroom during the period of formal education. Mixed gender learning environment is provided to help both boys and girls in building social maturity and developing communication skills”.

4.1.20 Career

It has also been learnt from the participants that some parents send their children to single sex schools because of the career as a factor. One of the traditional leaders said this:

“Some parents especially the Catholics send their children to single sex schools because of the career which their child would like to be. For example, if the parents want their daughter to be a nun then it is obvious that girls can be sent to single sex schools. If the parent wants their son to be a reverend, they can send the boy to a single sex school. But if the parents want their child to be a banker, then that child can be sent to co-education school”.

Factors that influenced parents to send their children to single sex schools than to co-educational schools in Malawi.

The study uncovered compelling factors influencing parents in Malawi to prefer single-sex schools over co-educational institutions. According to participants, single-sex schools are perceived as providing a conducive learning environment free from distractions. One respondent noted,

"I prefer my daughter to go to a girls' school because she can focus more on her studies without boys around." Another emphasized, "In single-sex schools, discipline is strict, and students are well-behaved compared to co-ed schools."

Parents also highlighted the strong academic reputation of single-sex schools and their consistent performance in national exams. One participant stated, "Single-sex schools have a track record of producing top exam results, which gives us confidence in their academic standards." Concerns about peer pressure were prevalent, with participants noting that single-sex schools mitigate social distractions.

"There's less peer pressure and more concentration on studies," explained a parent.

Furthermore, single-sex schools were praised for promoting leadership skills and offering greater subject choice without gender bias.

"Girls in single-sex schools are encouraged to take on leadership roles and excel in traditionally male-dominated subjects," shared a teacher.

Concerns about teacher professionalism and discrimination in co-educational settings were also raised. Overall, parents believe that single-sex schools enhance their children's academic achievements, self-esteem, and prospects for future success, emphasizing the perceived benefits of a focused and disciplined educational environment.

Perceptions and attitudes of learners towards single sex schools.

Almost 95% of learners enrolled in single-sex schools in Malawi overwhelmingly favor their educational environment over co-educational alternatives. They perceive single-sex schools as offering distinct advantages, primarily centered around focused learning and enhanced academic performance. According to participants, these schools provide a conducive atmosphere for studying without the distractions that can arise from mixed-gender interactions. As one student emphasized.

"Single-sex schools are better because there's less distraction and more focus on studying."
Another echoed this sentiment, stating, "I feel more comfortable learning without boys around."

However, amidst the strong endorsement for single-sex education, dissenting perspectives were also voiced. One female student articulated concerns about the limitations of socialization in single-sex schools, noting:

"I don't like single-sex schools because there's less socialization and it can be harder to adapt socially in the future."

This viewpoint underscores the trade-offs perceived by some learners, highlighting potential drawbacks such as reduced exposure to diverse social interactions and challenges in adapting to mixed-gender environments later in life.

On the contrary, participants attending co-educational schools defended their educational setting, asserting its benefits over single-sex schools. They emphasized the value of diverse social interactions and balanced perspectives that arise from learning alongside peers of both genders.

"In co-ed schools, we learn how to interact with both boys and girls, which prepares us better for real-world situations," shared one participant.

Others highlighted the importance of challenging gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity within educational settings.

Participants in co-educational schools argued that with equal resources and opportunities, their schools could achieve academic excellence comparable to single-sex institutions. They believe

that co-educational environments foster a broader understanding of social dynamics and prepare students more comprehensively for future challenges. This perspective suggests a preference for educational models that embrace inclusivity and aim to provide balanced learning experiences that reflect real-world diversity.

Overall, while single-sex schools are highly regarded by the majority of learners surveyed in this study for their academic focus and perceived advantages, the debate continues regarding the social and developmental impacts of such educational settings compared to co-educational environments. Both models offer unique benefits and challenges, influencing how parents and educators perceive the best educational approach for fostering students' academic success and social development in Malawi.

How single sex school learners differ in academic performance with those learners in co-educational schools.

The study conducted among teachers, learners, parents, and traditional local leaders consistently highlighted perceived differences in academic performance between students in single-sex schools and those in co-educational schools in Malawi. According to the majority of stakeholders, learners in single-sex schools tend to outperform their counterparts in co-educational settings, both in classroom activities and national examinations. Participants pointed out that single-sex schools provide an environment conducive to focused learning, without the distractions that mixed-gender settings may bring.

"In single-sex schools, students are more focused and less distracted, which reflects in their academic performance," noted one teacher.

However, amidst the prevailing viewpoint favoring single-sex education, dissenting opinions were also expressed. A female teacher from a co-educational school contested the notion of academic superiority in single-sex schools, stating,

"I don't see much difference in academic performance between single-sex and co-educational schools."

This perspective challenges the consensus among other stakeholders, suggesting that academic outcomes may not vary significantly based solely on school type.

The perceived academic advantages of single-sex schools, as emphasized by stakeholders, include enhanced concentration, tailored teaching methods, and reduced social distractions that can positively impact learning outcomes. Participants cited examples of improved performance in subjects traditionally perceived as challenging, such as mathematics and sciences, where students in single-sex schools often excel due to focused teaching approaches and less peer pressure. Conversely, the critique from the co-educational school teacher underscores ongoing debates about the comparative benefits of school environments. She suggested that factors beyond school type, such as teaching quality and student motivation, play crucial roles in determining academic success. This viewpoint challenges the premise that school type alone dictates academic performance, advocating instead for a broader consideration of various educational factors influencing student achievement. Overall, while stakeholders generally advocate for the academic benefits of single-sex schools in Malawi, acknowledging their role in fostering focused learning and potentially higher academic achievements, differing perspectives highlight the complexity of evaluating educational outcomes across different school types. Further research may be needed to explore these dynamics comprehensively, considering contextual factors and individual student experiences within varied educational settings.

Limitation of the Study

The limitation of the study was that of inadequate literature reflecting the Malawian scenario. The researcher would rely heavily on the literature conducted in other countries. The other limitation was the involvement of other schools which could have improved generalization of this research. Future research should consider increasing the sample size of schools, teachers, students, parents and traditional local leaders in order to explore more information about single sex schools. In addition to that, future research should research on the type of leadership/administration that is practiced in single sex schools, which might also contribute to good performativity of students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 Chapter Introduction

The findings of this study shed light on the factors influencing parental preferences for single-sex schools over co-educational institutions in Malawi. Parents predominantly favor single-sex schools due to perceived advantages such as focused learning environments, academic excellence, and reduced social distractions. This aligns with global educational trends where parents prioritize environments they believe enhance their children's academic performance and overall development (UNESCO, 2021).

5.1 The Discussions

Learners enrolled in single-sex schools overwhelmingly endorse their educational environment, citing benefits such as enhanced academic focus and fewer distractions compared to co-educational settings. These sentiments echo findings from international studies that emphasize the impact of school environment on student attitudes and performance (Viner et al., 2020). However, concerns about limited socialization opportunities in single-sex schools were also voiced by some students, highlighting a trade-off between academic focus and social development (Jayaweera et al., 2020).

Academically, stakeholders consistently perceive students in single-sex schools to outperform their counterparts in co-educational schools. This belief is supported by observations of focused learning environments and specialized teaching methods that cater to specific academic needs, particularly in subjects traditionally considered challenging (Smith et al., 2020). Nonetheless, dissenting views challenging the presumed academic superiority of single-sex schools suggest that factors beyond school type, such as teaching quality and student motivation, may play significant roles in educational outcomes (Morawska & Milton, 2020).

The debate extends to the social and developmental impacts of single-sex versus co-educational schooling. Single-sex schools are praised for promoting leadership skills and offering specialized academic pathways without gender bias. However, concerns persist about the social integration of

students and their ability to adapt to diverse social environments later in life (Brooks et al., 2020). This dichotomy underscores the need for educational policies that balance academic rigor with holistic development, ensuring all students receive equitable opportunities for growth and social interaction.

From a policy perspective, these findings underscore the importance of providing diverse educational options that cater to varied parental preferences and student needs. Policymakers should consider promoting educational environments that not only enhance academic achievement but also foster social inclusivity and holistic development. This approach ensures that educational reforms align with the aspirations and needs of Malawian students and families (UNICEF, 2020).

5.2 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, while single-sex schools in Malawi are viewed positively for their academic focus and specialized learning environments, ongoing discussions are needed regarding their broader impacts on social development and educational equity. By addressing these complexities and leveraging insights from both local contexts and global research, policymakers can develop evidence-based reforms that promote equitable access to quality education for all students in Malawi.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the factors driving parental preferences for single-sex schools over co-educational institutions in Malawi. It is evident that parents prioritize single-sex schools primarily for their perceived ability to offer a focused learning environment free from the distractions often associated with mixed-gender settings. The strong academic reputation of single-sex schools, along with the perceived benefits of strict discipline and reduced peer pressure, further reinforces this preference.

Learners' perspectives largely support these parental views, with a significant majority expressing a preference for single-sex education due to the conducive learning atmosphere it provides. Students feel that single-sex schools allow them to concentrate better on their studies, which they believe positively impacts their academic performance. However, some learners also highlighted the downside of limited socialization opportunities in single-sex schools, suggesting a trade-off between academic focus and social development.

The findings also reveal a prevailing belief among stakeholders that students in single-sex schools outperform their peers in co-educational settings. This perception is attributed to the focused learning environment and specialized teaching methods prevalent in single-sex schools. However, dissenting opinions emphasize that academic success is influenced by multiple factors, including teaching quality and student motivation, challenging the notion that school type alone determines educational outcomes.

The debate on the social and developmental impacts of single-sex versus co-educational schooling remains ongoing. While single-sex schools are praised for promoting leadership skills and offering specialized academic pathways without gender bias, concerns about the social integration of students and their adaptability to diverse environments persist. This underscores the need for balanced educational policies that cater to both academic excellence and holistic development.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study and its specific objectives, several recommendations can be made to address the perceptions and preferences regarding single-sex schools in Malawi:

Enhance Public Awareness and Education: There is a need to educate parents and guardians about the diverse benefits and potential drawbacks of single-sex schooling. This should include clear communication on how single-sex schools can provide a focused learning environment conducive to academic achievement. Simultaneously, efforts should be made to address concerns about socialization and ensure that parents have comprehensive information to make informed decisions about their children's education.

Promote Inclusivity and Diversity in Education: While acknowledging the academic benefits associated with single-sex schools, efforts should also focus on promoting inclusive educational environments. This can be achieved through initiatives that encourage co-educational settings to adopt best practices from single-sex schools, such as rigorous academic standards and specialized teaching methods. Additionally, promoting gender equality and challenging stereotypes within both types of schools can foster a more balanced approach to education.

Support Research and Continuous Evaluation: Given the ongoing debate about the comparative academic performance and social impacts of single-sex versus co-educational schooling, continuous research and evaluation are essential. Establishing longitudinal studies and conducting periodic assessments can provide updated insights into the effectiveness of different educational models in Malawi. This data-driven approach will help policymakers refine educational policies and practices to better meet the evolving needs of students and families.

5.3 Areas for further studies

Number of schools to be studied should increase by twice of the number of schools used in this study

The schools to be studied should have equal resources for example equal numbers of qualified teachers in all subjects, equal financial status, similar location and similar structures

The schools to be studied should be divided for example Mission schools should be studied separately from government public schools

Another further study should focus on the type of administrations used in both schools (single sex schools and co-education schools) are the same or not?

Last further study should look at rules and regulations followed in these schools (single sex schools and co-education schools) are they the same or not?

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APENDICES

APPENDIX A PERMISSION LETTER FOR MZUZU UNIVERSITY

A CONCENT LETTER

Dear participant,

I am a student of **MZUZU UNIVERSITY** in the department of education and teaching studies (ETS) under the supervision of Dr. Marisen Mwale. I am pursuing Master of Education (Leadership and Management).

You are hereby kindly invited to participate in research exercise titled:

INVESTIGATING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PARENTS TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO SINGLE SEX SCHOOLS:

A CASE STUDY OF SOME SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CHILADZULU, MULANJE AND THYOLO DISTRICTS. The purpose of the study is to probe factors that make parents to send their children to single sex schools. Furthermore, it is my intention to see to it that the result of this research will change the negative mindsets of parents on co-educational schools.

The study will employ such methods as interviews, questioners, observations and reviews of Documents. It is hoped that the derived information will influence policy makers on how best to equate both type of schools (Single sex schools and co-educational schools)

The information to be obtained from the research will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you have the liberty not to participate showed you not want to. You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study. Responses to the study will only be reported in aggregated for to protect the identity of respondents as an academic paper. Rest assured that the responses will only be used for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Neither the researchers how the university has a conflict of interest with the result.

Not compromising with confidentiality, research findings will be processed under the supervision board of **MZUZU UNIVERSITY**.

APPENDIX D LETTER OF NO OBJECTION FROM E.DM SHIRE HIGHLANDS DIVISION

Telephone: +265 01 466 400

Fax: +265 01 466 379

Cell: 0881382349/ 0999 343868

Email: examjima1@gmail.com/edmsjed@gmail.com
Communication should be addressed to:

The Education Division Manager



In reply quote
Ministry of Education
Shire Highlands Education Division
P/Bag 7
MULANJE
MALAWI

12/04/2022

REF: SHED/PF/52876

The Secretary for Education
Ministry of Education
Private Bag 328
LILONGWE 3.

LETTER OF NO OBJECTION FOR VICTOR H. MAIDA EMPLOYMENT NUMBER 52876

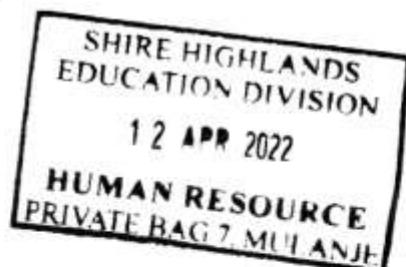
I write to certify that Mr. Victor Maida, TI employment number **52876** is an employee in the Ministry of Education currently working as Secondary School teacher at Gunda Community Day Secondary School in Thyolo district. He was employed as a Secondary school teacher in January, 2000.

He would like to apply for a study paid leave. He has been admitted at Mzuzu University to study Masters Degree in Education, Leadership and Management

Attached is his application letter and recommendation letter from the Head teacher

Yours faithfully,


KINLEY CHIMWALA



For :EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER-SHED

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION LETTER FROM E.D.M SHIRE HIGHLANDS DIVISION

Telephone: +265 01 466 400

Fax: +265 01 466 379

Cell: +265 999 345 868/ +265 881 388 349

Email: evenjima@gmail.com/edmsshed@gmail.com
Communication should be addressed to:
The Education Division Manager



In reply quote
Ministry of Education
Shire Highlands Education Division
P/Bag 7
MULANJE
MALAWI

7th June, 2023

THE HEAD TEACHER
THYOLO SECONDARY SCHOOL
PROVIDENCE SECONDARY SCHOOL
ST PATRICKS SECONDARY SCHOOL

PERMISSION TO ALLOW VICTOR MAIDA TO COLLECT DATA FOR A MASTER OF EDUCATION DEGREE IN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM.

Mr. Victor Maida is a student in the Department of Teaching,
Learning and Curriculum Studies at Mzuzu University.

Mr. Maida is working on his research and would like to collect
data at your institution as part of his studies.

He has been permitted to carry out the exercise at your school.

May you please give him all the support as he carries out this
exercise. Note that the results will **strictly** be used for academic
purposes.

C. KHWEPEYA
For: EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER



APPENDIX F

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS/QUESTIONNAIRE

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

1. Do you like the school where your child is learning? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. Explain your answer to question one above.
3. Does the school produce good results during national examination? Yes ☐ No ☐
4. Explain your answer in question 3 above.
5. How can you differentiate in terms of performance between this school (single sex) and mixed sex school?
6. How can you differentiate the behaviors of the students from these two types of schools?
7. If government wants to construct school. Which type of school could you wish to be constructed?

APPENDIX G

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS/ QUESTIONNAIRE

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LOCAL LEADERS

1. Given an opportunity to choose the type of where your child can be selected to.
Will you choose single sex or mixed school?
2. Give the reason to your answer in question 1. Above.
3. How can you differentiate behavior terms of learners of single sex schools and learners of mixed schools?
4. Many people think that single sex schools are best schools. Do you agree?
Yes ☐ No ☐
5. Can you explain your perceptions towards single sex schools?
6. If government wants to construct a second school in your area. Which type of school can you prefer to be constructed? Single sex or mixed set schools? Why?
Mixed ☐ Single ☐

APPENDIX I

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS/QUESTIONNAIRE

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

1. For how long have you been teaching in single sex schools?
2. Have you ever taught in mixed sex schools? Yes No
3. If the answer is “yes” to question 2. How many had you been teaching to mixed sex schools?
4. How can you compare in terms of participation of these two different types of schools i.e. single sex schools?
5. What are the advantages of single sex schools?
6. What are the disadvantages of single sex schools?
7. What are your perceptions and attitudes towards single sex schools?
8. If government and its development partners want to construct schools. Which type of school can you prefer to be constructed and why?

APPENDIX J

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS/QUESTIONNAIRE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

1. a. Are you happy to be the students of this school?

b. Explain your answer in 1.a. above Yes ☐ No ☐

2. Do you like this school? Yes ☐ No ☐

Explain your answer in 2.a.above?

3. What is good about single sex schools?

4. Is there any differences between single sex schools and mixed sex schools in terms of teaching and learning? Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Explain your answer in question 4.

6. Which subjects do you take?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

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Luwingu
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MALAWI

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mdolo.m@mzuni.ac.mw

8th May, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MR VICTOR MAIDA

Mr Victor Maida 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