

**School Managers' Implementation of the National Education Standards for
Secondary School Improvement: The Case of Four Secondary Schools in
Salima District**

By

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Declaration

I declare that “School Managers' Implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement: A Case Study of Four Selected Secondary Schools in Salima District” is my own original work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated by means of complete references. It is being submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Leadership and Management at Mzuzu University. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



24th November, 2025

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to four women who matter a lot in my life: my dear mother, Onamasina, my lovely wife, Madalitso, and my little angels, Victoria and Wongani. You are all the reason I had to finish this work.

ABSTRACT

The Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, developed the National Education Standards (NES) in 2015 to improve the quality of education in all primary, secondary, and teacher educational institutions. There are three categories of standards focusing on improving students' performance, teaching, and leadership and management. School Managers ought to play a greater role in ensuring that all the standards are effectively implemented. So far, there has not been any comprehensive study on how the NES are being implemented by secondary school managers. It is against this background that this study was conceived to assess the role of school managers in the implementation of the NES for school improvement in four selected secondary schools in Salima District.

The study used a qualitative research method, which employed a case study design. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who were head teachers, heads of departments and Quality Assurance Officers (Inspectors) from the Central East Education Division. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and document review to provide methodological triangulation. The thematic analysis method was used to deductively and inductively analyse the data. The results of the study indicated that the implementation of the national education standards was being done partially. The study revealed that ineffective orientation, infrequent and ineffective supervision, inadequate support and resources, and a negative attitude towards the NES negatively affected the implementation of the NES. To mitigate such challenges, the study has established that re-orientation of all stakeholders, allocation of adequate resources, involvement of all stakeholders, and intensified supervision should be done by school managers. The study has concluded that failure to effectively conduct orientation of all stakeholders of the implementation of the NES is a major contributing factor to the challenges the program is facing.

Key Words: National Education Standards, School Managers, Implementation, Cognitive Perspective, School Improvement

Glossary of acronyms/abbreviations

BoG	Board of Governance
CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
DIAS	Directorate of Inspection and Advisory Services
HOD	Head of Department
NES	National Education Standards
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
QAO	Quality Assurance Officer
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
INSET	In-service Training

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.0. Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the study	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.	3
1.3 Purpose of the study	4
1.4 Research objectives	4
<i>1.4.1 Main objective</i>	4
<i>1.4.2 Specific objectives</i>	4
1.5 Significance of the study	5
1.6 Theoretical Framework	6
1.7. Structure of the Thesis	8
1.8. Summary	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.0 Introduction	10
2.1. National Education Standards Defined	11
2.1.1 <i>Formulation of the National Education Standards</i>	11
2.1.2 <i>Implementation of the National Education Standards Policy</i>	12
2.1.3. <i>Implementation of the National Education Standards and Stakeholder Involvement</i>	15
2.2 Meaning of Management, Administration, and Leadership	18
2.2.1 <i>Effective Education Management</i>	19
2.2.2 <i>Impact of Management on Performance in Schools.</i>	20
2.3 School Improvement	23
2.4. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Education Policies	25
2.4.1 <i>Implementers' understanding of Vision, Mission, Goals, and Values of the institution.</i>	25
2.4.2 <i>Involving Stakeholders in the Policy Implementation</i>	26
2.4.3 <i>Institutional self-evaluation</i>	26
2.4.4 <i>Conducive Environment</i>	27
2.5. Challenges Facing the Implementation of Education Policies	27
2.5.1. <i>Ineffective Orientation</i>	27

2.52. Infrequent and Ineffective Supervision of the Implementation Process	28
2.5.3. Inadequate support and resources for the implementation of Educational policies.	29
2.5.4. Negative attitude by some stakeholders on the implementation of the standards.	29
2.6. Strategies for Overcoming Challenges Faced in the Implementation of Education Policies ...	30
2.6.1. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to ineffective orientation of policies.....	30
2.6.2. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to inadequate support and resources	31
2.6.3. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to stakeholder involvement.....	31
2.6.4. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to infrequent supervision	32
2.6.5. Strategies used to overcome negative attitude by some stakeholders	32
2.7.1. Education policy implementation in America	33
2.7.2. Education policy implementation in Asia (Thailand).....	34
2.7.3. Education policy implementation in South Africa	35
2.7.4. Education policy implementation in Malawi.....	36
2.8. Chapter Summary	37
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	38
3.0 Introduction	38
3.1 Research Design	38
3.4 Study Population	43
3.6 Sampling Technique	49
3.6.1 Research Site	49
3.6.2 School sample	50
3.6.3 Participants sample.....	50
3.7 Data Collection Methods	51
3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interviews	52
3.7.2 Official document review	52
3.8.1 Heads of Departments' interview guide	54
3.8.2 Head teacher interview guide.	54
3.8.3 Quality Assurance Officers interview guide.	55
3.9 Data Analysis	55
3.10 Credibility and trustworthiness	56
3.11 Ethical Consideration	56
3.12 Chapter Summary	57
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	58
4.0 Introduction	58

4.1 School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.....	58
4.2. The status of the implementation of the National Education Standards for secondary school improvement.....	59
4.2.1. <i>Assessment of implementation of specific standards for leadership and management.....</i>	59
4.2.2. <i>Establishment and implementation of school vision and goals</i>	60
4.2.3. <i>School self-evaluation and improvement.....</i>	66
4.2.4. <i>Staff supervision and development.....</i>	70
4.2.5. <i>Care and welfare of students</i>	73
4.2.6. <i>Management of buildings and facilities.....</i>	77
4.3. Challenges that School Managers are facing in the implementation of National Education Standards for Secondary School Improvement.	78
4.3.1. <i>Lack of understanding of the National Education Standards for school improvement</i>	78
4.3.2. <i>Ineffective orientation to the National Education Standards for school improvement</i>	82
4.3.3. <i>Infrequent and ineffective supervision of the implementation process.....</i>	87
4.3.4. <i>Inadequate support and resources for the implementation of National Education Standards for school improvement.</i>	90
4.3.5. <i>Negative attitude by some stakeholders on the implementation of the standards.</i>	93
4.4. Possible strategies for improving the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.....	94
4.4.1. <i>Re-orientation of School Managers and regular CPDs on the implementation of the National Education Standards.</i>	95
4.4.2. <i>Allocation of adequate resources and provision of managerial support.....</i>	98
4.4.3. <i>Involvement of all stakeholders</i>	102
4.4.4. <i>Empowerment and motivation of all stakeholders.....</i>	107
4.4.5. <i>Intensifying supervision of the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.....</i>	109
4.5. Chapter Summary.....	113
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	114
5.0 Introduction.....	114
5.1 Summary of Major Findings.....	114
5.2 Conclusion	115
5.3 Contribution of the study to the education community.....	116
5.3 Recommendations.	117

5.3.1	<i>Recommendations to the School Managers.</i>	117
5.3.2	<i>Recommendations to the Ministry of Education</i>	118
5.3.3	<i>Suggestions for further study.</i>	118
REFERENCES		120
APPENDICES		
Appendix A: Introduction letter from Mzuzu University		129
Appendix B: Introduction letter from the Division Manager (CEED)		130
Appendix C: Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) Approval		131
Appendix D: Information sheet for the head of department's participation in a research . project		133
Appendix D: Informed consent form for head of department.		135
Appendix E: Information sheet for the head teachers' participation in the research.		136
Appendix F: Informed consent form for the head teacher.		138
Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Guide for Heads of Departments		139
Appendix H: Interview guide for Head teachers and Deputy Head teachers		142
Appendix I: Interview guide for Divisional Quality Assurance Officers of CEED		145

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the background against which the study on School Managers' implementation of National Educational Standards for secondary school improvement was conducted. It also discusses the nature of the problem and provides the significance of the study. It further formulates the research objectives that were used to set parameters for this investigation. The theoretical framework that guided the study has also been discussed.

1.1 Background of the study

The United Nations Global Agenda on Education emphasises the need to improve the quality of education in the world (Prior, Goldstein & Leckie, 2020). Malawi, being a signatory to many United Nations conventions on education in particular, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Hammarberg, 1997), stipulates in **Section 25** of her Constitution that every person is entitled to education and that all educational institutions should be operating in accordance with official standards. In line with the Constitution is the Education Act (2013), which in **section 4 (e)** empowers the Minister of Education to set and maintain National Education Standards (NES). In exercise of such powers, the Ministry developed the first National Education Standards in 2015. The Standards were also aligned to the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II) and the National Education Sector Plan 2008-2017.

Educational standards are defined as the minimum requirements which all schools in the country are mandated to achieve (NES, 2015, p 6). They specify the expected outcomes for students which should be delivered by all education providers in both public and private institutions of teaching and learning. The standards also identify the leadership, management and teaching processes which are necessary for the achievement of national education outcomes.

The overall purpose of the National Education Standards is to improve in several areas of school operations, like students' performance, teachers' performance as well and school infrastructure. Effective implementation of the standards very much depends on the appropriate management strategies that the school leadership is putting in place. Of more significance amongst all the 26 Education Standards formulated are the 12 standards which concentrate on the role of school management and leadership in improving the affairs of the school, which is the focus of this study. The standards stipulate the following as the role of the school leadership and management in ensuring school improvement. Firstly, providing a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Secondly, developing a good working relationship with parents and members of staff. Lastly, efficient and effective utilisation of available resources.

Education management is meant to effectively and efficiently create and maintain environments within the educational institutions that promote, support, and sustain effective teaching and learning. It is to do with the administration of the education system in which a group combines human and material resources to supervise, plan, strategise, and implement structures to execute an education system. Ndidi et al (2025) defined educational management as a process of planning,

organizing, directing, and controlling the activities and resources of educational institutions to achieve defined goals.

School Managers are supposed to play a key and pivotal role in the implementation of the National Education Standards. Apart from being the first recipients of the standards on the school, they are also entrusted with the role of interpreting the standards to the subordinates, providing resources for implementation as well as supervising the actual implementation process. Therefore, the study was aimed at assessing the strategies the School Managers were putting in place in order to effectively implement the National Education Standards. Through the effective implementation of the standards, quality of education in the secondary schools will be attained.

1.2 Statement of the problem.

The Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, developed the National Education Standards in 2015 in order to improve the quality of education in all primary, secondary and teacher educational institutions. The standards are minimum requirements which all schools in the country are mandated to achieve (NES, 2015, p 6). There are three categories of standards focusing on improving students' performance, teaching, and leadership and management. School Managers are supposed to play a greater role of ensuring that all the standards are effectively implemented.

The National Education Standards have been in operation for a period of about eight years, however, the general performance of many secondary schools still remains low. A lot of research has been done on the impact of management and leadership styles on students' performance.

However, there has not been any comprehensive study on how the National Education Standards are being implemented by the secondary School Managers and whether the implementation is effective or not. It is against this background of knowledge gap that this study was conceived to assess the role of School Managers in the implementation of the National Education Standards for secondary school improvement in four selected secondary schools in Salima District.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to assess the administrative practices used to facilitate implementation of the National Education Standards in four secondary schools in Salima district. The results of the study have the potential to provide a greater understanding of the role of School Managers in the implementation of the education standards for secondary school improvement. It has further highlighted the educational management strategies appropriate for the successful implementation of the education standards.

1.4 Research objectives

1.4.1 Main objective

The main objective of this study was to assess the School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

The main objective was supported by the following sub-objectives:

- To identify the status of the implementation of the National Education Standards for secondary school improvement.

- To analyse the challenges that School Managers are facing in implementing National Education Standards for secondary school improvement.
- To investigate possible strategies for improving the implementation of the National Education Standards for ensuring secondary school improvement.

1.5 Significance of the study

The goal of any government is to provide its citizens with high quality education. The government of Malawi through the Ministry of Education developed the National Education Standards in 2015 to improve the performance of the schools. The study has the potential to enlighten stakeholders of education on the suitable management techniques to be employed for the effective implementation of the National Education Standards. Such techniques should help School Managers in improving performance of their education institutions.

The study has the possibility of creating awareness on the challenges School Managers are facing as they implement the National Education Standards. This can inform stakeholders of the possible intervention strategies in order to overcome such challenges and therefore enhance effective implementation of the standards.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The research was framed by a cognitive perspective on policy implementation (Spillane et al, 2002). The theory assesses the role of enactors' sense making or understanding of the policy in the implementation process. The ideas that implementers construct from the way they understand the policy are critical to their enactment of that policy. Implementation involves interpretation that the implementers figure out of what a policy means in order to decide whether and what to ignore, adapt, or adopt policy makers' recommendations in their practice.

Following the cognitive framework is a number of factors that influence implementation of the policies and these are:

- (a) Ambiguous, unclear, and inconsistent policies result in variations in the way different implementers will implement the policies.
- (b) Local factors, including the agendas of the implementing agency and agents, community attitudes, resources, and time, are especially influential in the implementation process (Okonkwo et al, 2018). Policies that fit local agendas are embraced, whereas those that do not are opposed or modified.
- (c) Uncertainty about the goals, limited supervision and resources, increases implementers variations in the implementation of the policies (Lipsky, 1980).

Investigating what sense implementers make of the education standards is important as it determines their ability to implement the policy. With its general constructivist perspective, cognitive theory suggests that people use their prior knowledge and experiences to construct new understandings. Coming to know involves the reconstruction of existing knowledge rather than

the passive absorption of knowledge (Anderson & Smith, 1987). Moreover, sense-making is influenced by the social, physical, and cultural contexts of the sense maker (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Applying these ideas to National Education Standards implementation, the secondary School Managers should understand the education standards policy to ensure its effective implementation. Policy implementation, like the National Education Standards, requires collaboration and teamwork amongst the different key role players in education at a school. The implication of this is that other role players in education at the school level need to be sensitised or enlightened about what the standards mean to them at the school if they are to effectively participate in the implementation process. All this means that the effective implementation of National Education Standards depends on the role that school leaders are to play to ensure effective enactment of the policy. It is therefore imperative that School Managers should first understand the standards themselves before bringing other stakeholders or role players on board. There is a need for the School Managers to orient other stakeholders on what the education standards mean and what needs to be done in order to implement the standards effectively. As explained by Brynard (2002), the implementation of a policy can fail, sometimes not because of the unwillingness of the implementers, but perhaps because their ability to implement is hampered by their failure to understand what the policy means.

On a similar note, from a cognitive perspective theory, local school beliefs, agendas, and situations are important influences on the effective implementation of a policy such as the National Education Standards. This study, therefore also sets out to establish the factors which negatively influence the implementation of the National Education Standards policy and make recommendations on how these factors may be minimised.

The only major shortfall of the cognitive perspective on policy implementation is that it is not an alternative to conventional models but rather is meant to supplement and not supplant existing models of the implementation process. Despite such, the model is best suited to this study because it is meant to characterise the way that sense-making practices can lead to the types of challenges observed in reform or improvement efforts. With such knowledge, the School Managers may be provided with possible strategies for minimising the challenges identified so as to facilitate the implementation of education policies like the national education standards for school improvement. The Cognitive theory guided the formulation of the research methodology, especially data collection instruments and data analysis.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has five chapters, which have been outlined as follows: The first chapter is an introduction of the report and covers the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research objectives, significance of the study, as well as the theoretical framework that guided the study. Chapter two outlines the literature that was reviewed. The methods and tools for data collection, research design, sampling procedures, and data analysis are covered in chapter three. The fourth chapter presents the research findings as well as the discussion of the findings. The final chapter of this thesis contains the conclusion where the contribution of the study to the education community, recommendations, and suggestions for areas of further study have been presented.

1. 8. Summary

This chapter presented the background of the study and the direction the researcher wished to take. It has discussed the problem that the study wanted to investigate, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, as well as the theoretical framework that guided the study. The review of the literature that sets the basis for this study is done in the next chapter, Chapter 2.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the reviewed literature in the study. A literature review is an attempt to interpret and synthesize what has been studied, researched, and published in an area of interest (Lungu, 2009). This study was set out to investigate the School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for School improvement. As the study focused on the National Education Standards, an attempt was first made to review the meaning, formulation, contents, and implementation of the National Education Standards. The literature was then reviewed on the meaning of leadership and management, as well as school improvement. The literature further endeavored to review studies that have been conducted on factors and challenges facing the implementation of the national education standards. The review finally assessed studies conducted on the strategies for overcoming the challenges faced in the implementation process. The review was conducted in order to find out whether the challenges that other education systems have faced in implementing government policies like the national education standards are similar to those in Malawi. The review of studies on the challenges facing the implementation of the national education standards was also utilized in this study in order to glean some lessons on how such School Managers in other parts of the world were able to solve their challenges. Such review may help School Managers in Malawi to either adopt or adapt similar solutions to solve the challenges facing the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement.

2.1. National Education Standards Defined

Education standards are defined as the minimum requirements which all schools in the country are mandated to achieve (NES, 2015, p 6). The standards articulate clearly the educational experiences and achievements which key stakeholders, in particular students, parents and community members, should expect their own school to deliver. They further guide individual institutions and practitioners in reviewing and improving their practice.

2.1.1 *Formulation of the National Education Standards*

In section 4 of the Education Act 2013, the Malawi Ministry of Education is mandated to set and maintain national education standards. In this line, the Directorate of Inspection and Advisory Services (DIAS) in the Ministry of Education played a key role in the development and production of the first education standards in 2015. There are 26 national education standards, which are grouped into three categories. The first group specifies expected outcomes for students, the second one is to do with expected teaching processes, and the final category identifies the leadership and management expected roles. So the standards mainly focus on improved students' performance, improved teaching, and improved leadership and management at primary, secondary, and teacher education levels (NES, 2015)

The national education standards identify minimum requirements that all schools in Malawi should aim to achieve. Schools are required to focus on areas of weakness identified through the use of the standards and improve them through the school improvement plan. Of more significance amongst all the 26 educational standards formulated are the 12 standards which concentrate on the

role of school management and leadership in improving the affairs of the school, which is the focus of the study. These standards focus on the practical actions the School Managers take to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Since the school leaders are mandated to ensure that the teaching staff helps the students to achieve their outcomes, the study mainly focused on the role of education management in the implementation of the standards. Effective management is one of the most crucial facilitating factors of the education standards implementation (Botha, 2016).

The implementation of education standards will also determine the quality of education in the schools. The twelve national education standards for leadership and management which the study concentrated much on are as follows (NES, 2015, p. 10): (i) vision, goals and values, (ii) self-evaluation and improvement, (iii) governance, (iv) leadership, (v) partnership with parents and the community, (vi) Staff supervision and development, (vii) Staff deployment and management, (viii) Care and welfare of students, (ix) Access, equity and inclusion, (x) Management of buildings and facilities, (xi) Management of material resources, and (xii) financial management.

2.1.2 *Implementation of the National Education Standards Policy*

Yaro et al. (2017) define policy implementation as the routine governmental processes of putting the government's targeted goals into action, which is usually done by government agencies or their officials in accordance with the stipulation of law. Effective implementation of education policies like the national education standards is, therefore, important as it leads to the attainment of quality education. Implementation of the national education standards requires the implementers'

understanding of it as a policy. School change scholars suggest that unless teachers, school leaders, and other actors in education understand and share the policy meaning, it is unlikely to be implemented (Fullan, 2015). Rayou and van Zanten (2015) give an enlightening definition of an education policy: “education policies are programmes developed by public authorities, informed by values and ideas, directed to education actors and implemented by administrators and education professionals”.

Fullan (2015) further defines education policy implementation as “the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change. The change may be externally imposed or voluntarily sought; explicitly defined in detail or developed and adapted incrementally through use; designed to be used uniformly or deliberately planned so that users can make modifications according to their perceptions of the needs of the situation”.

“Effective implementation” simply means implementation that “gets things done”, i.e., that achieves the government’s goals (Barber, 2015). Such implementation may either be of the whole policy or part of it, depending on the objectives of the framers of such a policy. According to the national education standards for secondary schools (NES, 2015, p 11), school practitioners and managers are expected to select a small group of specific standards at a particular period for implementation. They should use these standards to identify areas for improvement to include in their school improvement plans. Education Advisers are expected to use Standard 16 (School self-evaluation and improvement) in following up inspections, identifying improvement targets,

monitoring the school's progress in taking the necessary action, and evaluating whether the school has achieved what it set out to do in its action plans (NES, 2015, p 11). This means that the School Managers should put in place mechanisms where the school is able to evaluate itself on how it is faring as far as the implementation process of the standards is concerned. In fact, Dane and Schneider (2008) claim that a policy implementation can be said to be effective if there is adherence to the intentions of the enactors. This, therefore, means that school leaders should put in place internal assessment mechanisms for the effective implementation of the NES in the school.

In many countries, there has been a move away from school evaluation, which emphasises compliance with central policies and procedures towards much greater stress being placed on the need for schools to evaluate themselves as part of wider strategies of school improvement (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Partly as a result of this strengthened school autonomy, the role of external evaluation has undergone significant change, and achieving a much closer alignment between self-evaluation and external evaluation has become a key policy objective. Self-evaluation has the merit of being immediate, responsive to the school's specific needs and circumstances, and its results are 'owned' by the school.

Since the aim of the Standards is to specify both minimum requirements and what constitutes effective practice in educational provision and practice, the NES (2015) stipulate that the standards are expected to be used by several stakeholders, some of whom are as follows:

- Inspectors for their planned evaluation and reporting on school quality across the country.

- Advisory services for monitoring of the production and implementation of school improvement plans, to supervise the work of education practitioners, and to provide the necessary support.
- Schools for the identification of areas where improvement is needed and to build the necessary action into their improvement plans.
- National agencies, development partners, and civil society organisations will use the Standards to contextualise and plan their support for education within the context of national, district, and school improvement plans.

This study focused on investigating the implementation of national education standards for secondary schools in Malawi by school management and leadership for school improvement. For this reason, this study also reviewed literature on the concepts of School Management and Leadership as well as School Improvement. These concepts are discussed in detail in the sub-sections below:

2.1.3. Implementation of the National Education Standards and Stakeholder Involvement

From the beginning, school leaders must take the initiative to involve stakeholders in the implementation of the national education standards. This begins with identifying what the School Managers want the stakeholders to know about their vision as a school and their results to date, and articulating what they can do to achieve and sustain improved results. Schools exist to serve the educational needs of the community (Charles & Sunday, 2015). The community's schools are at their best when they are sharply focused on specific, mission-oriented outcomes, such as

empowering all students to become successful, and when they are consistently successful in delivering on the mission. The community itself is at its best when its stakeholders know how the schools are performing and when they advocate for and collaboratively support improved outcomes. Parents and community members must have a strong vested interest in the success of the schools and must co-own the outcomes produced. What is needed now is for schools to identify and actively engage all stakeholders in fulfilling the mission and enacting the vision of all students succeeding in school.

A stakeholder is an individual or group with an interest in the success of an organization in fulfilling its mission, delivering intended results, and maintaining the viability of its products, services, and outcomes over time (Walt, 1994; Adebayo, 2013). These stakeholders may either be internal or external to the school as an organisation (Paine & McCann, 2009). Internal stakeholders are those who work within the school system daily and who largely control what goes on there. They include school staff and the students. External stakeholders are those outside the day-to-day work of the schools who have a strong interest in school outcomes but who do not directly determine what goes into producing those outcomes.

2.1.3.1 *Why involve stakeholders?*

The distinction between internal and external education stakeholders is important. With respect to the implementation of policies (Paine & McCann, 2009), such as the national education standards, internal stakeholders clearly have greater capacity to produce positive change in schools, but they do not have all the powers needed to sustain it. External stakeholders also have a critical role to

play in sustaining effective implementation of the national education standards for school improvement. If they are informed of the school's vision and goals, they can help sustain the school's focus over time.

2.1.3.2 What does it take to engage stakeholders in the implementation of the national education standards?

The kind of engagement being considered here is different from what both educators and external stakeholders might think of when pondering the notion of parent and community engagement in schools. This is not merely about involvement in social events, fundraising efforts, or traditional involvement in activities such as parent training, homework assistance, and general volunteering. Yaro et al (2017) emphasised that it is about ongoing collaboration focused squarely on what schools are there for—student learning—and about transparent dialogue on the need that many schools face to improve student learning. Beginning this dialog does not ensure a successful partnership. Charles and Sunday (2015) provided some guidelines for schools to engage with stakeholders:

- (i) The staff must take the lead to provide stakeholders with the data and other information they need to be productive partners around student achievement.
- (ii) Partnership activities must be directly aligned with student achievement goals.
- (iii) Efforts must be collaborative and genuine. There are meaningful roles for each party to play, and these must be clearly articulated.
- (iv) Information sharing must be transparent. Achievement data must be clear, accurate, and meaningful.

- (v) All parties must operate from common values and a common vision for student achievement.
- (vi) All efforts must be mission-oriented and data-driven.

2.2 Meaning of Management, Administration, and Leadership

The School is an organization of complex activities that are carried out by people and are coordinated by different persons. Thus, management is necessary in school to coordinate the various activities of the units for goal achievement. Lochmiller and Chesnut (2017) say that management in a school is about working with and through teachers, non-teaching staff, and students to get things done effectively. School management has its attention primarily on the school. It is more concerned with the institution, its goals, policies, and execution of these policies. In school management, the primary aim has to do with the improvement of teaching and learning, and all the activities of the school (Fullan, 2018). The functions of management in a school are performed by the school's head (i.e., head teacher/principal), known as the school manager. The head teacher is assisted by the deputy head teacher and heads of departments. Together with the head teacher, they form what is called school management. In this study, they are all referred to as School Managers. They are there to direct the affairs of the school in such a way as to achieve its primary goals and objectives. Therefore, for school management to accomplish the set objectives, they have to work with other people within the school system and be able to inspire them to work cooperatively so as to achieve the educational objectives.

The words management and administration have often been used interchangeably. However, some scholars have tried to differentiate them based on their functions. School management is mainly to

do with planning, designing, initiating actions, monitoring activities, and demanding results on the basis of allocated resources (Northhouse, 2016). On the other hand, school administration involves the implementation of the policies, procedures, rules, and regulations as set up by the management. School management plays a major role as far as the provision of quality education and training is concerned. To achieve this, there has to be a well-established and effective management and administrative machinery. The primary objective of educational management, therefore, is the practical functioning and improvement of both teaching and learning in a school environment through the effective harnessing of administrative tools under the guidance of transformational leadership (Lochmiller and Chesnut, 2017). Apart from playing the managerial and administrative roles, the school heads also have a leadership role to play.

Leadership is a process whose important ingredient is the influence exercised by the leader on a group of people. The influence normally depends on the willingness of the people to carry out what they are being directed to perform. In fact, Northhouse (2016) says that leadership is an exercise to influence the behaviour of the followers towards the attainment of specific goals. So to be successful, a leader should be able to guide the subordinates to set their individual goals set by themselves in a way that they do not conflict with the organisational goals. The achievement of individual goals should help in the achievement of the goals of the whole organisation.

2.2.1 Effective Education Management

Learning institutions, like all other organisations, have their prescribed goals and objectives which they aim to achieve. The effectiveness of educational management is measured in the successful attainment of such goals and objectives. Fullan (2018) says that successful educational

management has its roots in a proper combination of consistency and dynamism. Not only do the educational managers have to be consistent in their efforts, leadership, managing duties, and learning, but they also have to be dynamic to ensure that all activities are being run properly (Okonko et al, 2018). Effective management needs to consider the acceptance of the challenge of change. The forces of this change emanate from factors of both the internal and external environment of the school. The management's ability to anticipate and prepare for the change, or effective change management strategies, should enable the institution to perform as desired. In their study on the role of School Managers in the implementation of continuous assessment, Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) said that the responsibility of the teacher's leader is to change things, make things happen, correct things, and improve things. This is why the implementation of the education standards demands that the School Managers first assess the areas of weakness in the school so as to bring the desired improvement and change. The aim here is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of education (Supardi, 2015; Aziz, 2016; Kurniawati et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Impact of Management on Performance in Schools.

A lot of research underscores the fact that management has a direct impact on the performance of the school (Okonkwo et al, 2018; Khajageva & Abisheva, 2016). It rests upon the school management to provide necessary leadership in the course of achieving the goals of the school as an organisation. Thus, to achieve the quality of education in accordance with the national goals of education and to overcome various problems that often arise, good education management is needed. Education management plays a greater role in the desired performance of the school.

Most of the challenges facing education standards implementation could be addressed from a school leadership and management perspective, as they require functions of quality control, learner management, staffing, parent involvement, staff motivation, conflict management, and so on. This is supported by Myles Munroe (2008), who articulates “Nothing happens without leadership, nothing changes without leadership, and nothing develops without leadership. Nothing improves without leadership, and nothing is corrected without leadership”.

Sound management and administrative techniques are essential for the effective functioning of the education and training system and its institutions. Hence, education managers and administrators at all levels should be knowledgeable, experienced, and highly qualified academically and professionally, and should have skills in educational management and administration (Fullan, 2018; Okonkwo et al, 2018; Khajayeva & Abisheva, 2016).

Management of the school has a direct and indirect impact on the academic performance of the school. Khajayeva and Abisheva (2016), in their study, —The importance of leadership and management in the education system- said that education management and leadership play a pivotal role as they are directly related to the internal development of the human system in the school. On the direct impact of School Managers, Hanushek (2005) observed that the most direct path for a school to attain substantial gains in student performance is to adopt policies and practices that will improve its teaching force. Therefore, to improve academic achievement, the school leader needs to work with teachers to build instructional capacity and to develop a school culture that nurtures academic success. Further to this, Robinson et al (2008) in their research on the role

of educational management on students' performance concluded that the closer educational leaders get to the core process of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on student achievement. This means that for school leadership to have a positive effect on teacher behaviour that will promote student learning, they need to be directly related to improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

Many scholars have argued that, to a larger extent, School Managers have an indirect impact on the academic performance of the school as compared to the direct impact. In support of this assertion, Bossert, Heck, and Hallinger (2002) cited three indirect ways that educational leadership makes a difference in improving student learning: The first way is by setting goals and their courses of action. To facilitate goal setting, school leaders need to articulate the vision of the school (NES, 2015), generate high performance expectations, continuously monitor school performance, and provide feedback about performance to the subordinates. Another way is through developing people by providing teachers and other members of staff with the needed support and training. Leadership actions to help make the transformations include offering intellectual stimulation, giving individualised support, and supplying models of best practices and beliefs. The last way is through redesigning the school organisation by making it work to ensure that a wide range of conditions and incentives support teaching and learning. Management and leadership should act to advance organisational change, including strengthening school cultures and building collaborative processes.

In a nutshell, School Managers should play both the direct and indirect roles in order to effect a positive impact on the academic performance of the school. They should be knowledgeable enough to use suitable and effective leadership and management styles. Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) argued that good leaders will always birth good schools. This is further supported by Kruger and Sternman (2003), who stated that effective education cannot be realised without leadership and management. School leaders have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset, and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools in challenging circumstances.

2.3 School Improvement

The sole purpose of introducing the education standards by the Malawi Ministry of Education was to bring about improvement in the performance of both public and private educational institutions. To attain effective school improvement, School Managers are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the successful implementation of the national education standards. School improvement refers to collectively supporting factors in the organisation that enhance students' possibilities for learning in relation to a complex surrounding world (Harris et al, 2013). The focus of learning within the school is a central feature of a school improvement process. This process is ideally done with the school's strategic management. The appreciation of the strategic management discourse is premised on the processes and plans to achieve the strategic goals of the school as an organisation (Babafemi, 2015; Habib and Hassan, 2017).

Effective achievement of the school improvement plan depends on a number of factors. Kalman (2020) describes some of the factors as school culture, leadership, teacher collaboration, staff development, involvement of staff, students, and the community in school policies and decisions. A lot of international research has singled out school principals' competence to be one of the most influential factors on student achievement in schools (Adaletery & George, 2019; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020; Heck & Hallinger, 2014). So effective management tends to be the main driver of improvement efforts and positive change within their institutions. In recognition of the role of school leadership in the success of school improvement efforts, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) claim that school leadership affects the features of schools, enhances the quality of teaching and learning at schools, and that leadership plays a central role in coordinating improvement efforts at schools. So, educational leadership should aim at attaining meaningful and sustainable School Improvement.

The framers of the national education standards emphasised the need for the School Managers, in collaboration with all stakeholders, to formulate school action plans that should facilitate effective implementation of the education standards for improvement of the school. The process starts with analysing all possible actions through models such as PESTEL and SWOT analysis (Thompson, Strickland and Gamble, 2016). The action plans for the whole school will be supported by the individual teachers' and departmental action plans.

Implementation of the school action plans should be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation throughout all stages of the implementation process. School management may face challenges like

people being out of touch with the strategic goals if there are no proper monitoring procedures (McLellan, 2020). In fact, monitoring is said to be an unceasing evaluation of plans based on early detailed information about the progress or delay of an ongoing evaluated activity (Delponte et al, 2017).

The school management should ensure that there is always efficiency in the execution of the action plans. A plan that is too costly to embark on may not be worth taking, considering the already constrained resources and unreliable funding that characterise public schools. Paragososo and Barazon (2019) say that an effective evaluation process will be achieved where there is clear clarification of the responsibilities of the concerned personnel throughout the process. School management, being the custodians of the first-hand information and knowing problems at the grassroots level, can do the evaluation of the job effectively, or they can delegate. The main aim here is to increase students' achievement, attendance, and effective implementation of the national education standards (McLellan, 2020).

2.4. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Education Policies

The successful implementation of education policies like the National Education Standards depends on a number of factors. Several studies have revealed some of these factors as:

2.4.1 Implementers' understanding of Vision, Mission, Goals, and Values of the institution.

The national education standards (NES, 2015) require School Managers to have a good understanding of the school's vision, mission, and goals. In fact, some researchers like Gurley et

al (2013) pointed out that the key to improving the schools' quality is for the School Managers at the school level to build and understand the vision, mission, goals, and values for the school. This is also in line with the findings of Ahanhanzo et al (2006), who concluded that having a common vision and goals for education indicates a level of transparency that is advantageous for all stakeholders to participate in the implementation of educational policies at the school.

2.4.2 *Involving Stakeholders in the Policy Implementation*

In their study on the participation of stakeholders in the planning of strategies, Gustafsson, Ivner, and Palm (2015) concluded that limited participation in the process of planning had an influence on the impact and legitimacy of the strategies of the organisation. In fact, Wilson (2013) posts that involving key personnel like stakeholders in the strategy formulation process creates ownership and support by all players, which is crucial for the success during the implementation stage. Further to this, Sulastri et al (2020) observed that schools that do not fully engage all stakeholders in the formulation of their plans will find it difficult to carry out various continuous improvement efforts effectively.

2.4.3 *Institutional self-evaluation*

Successful implementation of education policies like the national education standards also rests on the schools' requirement to regularly conduct self-evaluation (NES, 2015). This enables School Managers to have information regarding the status of their institution as far as policy implementation and school improvement are concerned. In their study, Hofman et al (2009) observed that the effects of School Self-evaluation on school quality were strongly driven by schools' desire to improve. Research further indicates that school self-evaluation can have a

positive impact on school improvement and outcomes for students (Caputo and Rastelli, 2014; Ferguson et al, 2000).

2.4.4 *Conducive Environment*

Growing research emphasises the importance of creating an enabling environment for the implementation of education policies. Researchers like Maelan et al (2018) say that policy implementation at the school level may fail sometimes because the school environment is not conducive enough for stakeholders to freely participate. They encouraged School Managers to see to it that institutions have a safe and respectful teaching and learning environment in which both teachers and students feel heard, seen, and valued. This necessitates the need for School Managers to come up with proper strategies and forums where members of staff and students are free to share their concerns with the school leaders (Nuwayo, 2021).

2.5. *Challenges Facing the Implementation of Education Policies*

Literature has revealed a number of factors that either derail or prevent the implementation of education policies like the National Education Standards. Some of the notable factors are ineffective orientation, infrequent supervision, inadequate support and resources, and a negative attitude by stakeholders.

2.5.1. *Ineffective Orientation*

Implementation of the education policies is very much affected by the nature of orientation that the potential implementers were subjected to. In the study conducted by Kotridge and Yunos (2015), it was revealed that the lack of adequate training for supervisors and teachers negatively affected the quality

of teaching and learning. The kind of orientation that was used here was the cascade model, which was also used when the National Education Standards were being introduced in 2015. Despite the model being considered cost-effective, data have shown that it has problems in terms of failure to transmit the intended information (Thornton, 2005). The cascade model's effectiveness depends on the competence and skills of the person to train others at the final stage. As Rembe (2006) said, orientation of this kind results in poor transmission of information, as most of the information previously acquired may end up being diluted in the process of further training. He further posts that leaders attending the initial orientation find it difficult to relay information to their subordinates in a manner that retains the essence of what was conveyed by the trainer who facilitated the initial orientation.

2.5.2. Infrequent and Ineffective Supervision of the Implementation Process

The effectiveness of the implementation of a policy like the national education standards also relies heavily on the quality of supervision. In their study, Sudarni et al. (2021) established that supervision improves teacher performance, and a lack of or infrequent supervision leads to irrelevance. A study conducted by Wanzare (2013) on instructional supervision in public schools in Kenya reveals that the purpose of supervision is to improve classroom instruction, which in turn improves student academic achievement and quality of education. Wanzare considers that failure to regularly supervise educational institutions negatively affects the implementation of education policies and affects the quality of education.

2.5.3. Inadequate support and resources for the implementation of Educational policies.

The study conducted by Bossert et al. (2002) established that a lack of support by the educational leadership to teachers and other members of staff is one of the factors negatively affecting the implementation of education policies and goals. Leadership at the school level is about redesigning the school organisation by making it work to ensure that a wide range of conditions and incentives support teaching and learning. According to Nandasinghe (2020), leadership is the process of encouraging and helping others to work enthusiastically toward the achievement of educational objectives. This is in line with the findings of the study by Waters (2021), who concluded that good leadership should embrace the principles of management, which support the achievement of the organizational objectives by providing adequate resources towards the achievement of educational goals. The study done by Kumbuga & Dadi (2015) also revealed that inadequate funding negatively affected the supervision of schools and hence affected the implementation of education policies.

2.5.4. Negative attitude by some stakeholders on the implementation of the standards.

Spillane's (2002) cognitive theory of policy implementation posits that local factors, including the agendas of the implementing agency and agents, community attitudes, resources, and time, are especially influential in the implementation process. The study by Okonkwo et al (2018) further established that policies that fit local agendas are embraced, whereas those that do not are opposed or modified. They therefore emphasised that school leaders have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset, and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools in challenging circumstances. Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) argued

that good leaders will always birth good schools. This is further supported by Kruger and Sternman (2003), who stated that effective education cannot be realised without leadership and management.

Maluleke (2015) points out that a school principal's failure to embrace an educational policy places that policy at risk of delayed or inadequate implementation. She argues that the positive public reception that a new policy receives from a school's principal conveys a message to teachers and non-teaching staff. Conversely, a negative reception by the principal may reinforce resistance to the new policy. Therefore, Muleke's study established that the principal's attitude can influence teachers' disposition toward the policy and its training component.

2.6. Strategies for Overcoming Challenges Faced in the Implementation of Education Policies

This section focuses on reviewing literature related to do with strategies used by School Managers to effectively implement education policies like the National Education Standards. The strategies range from those used to overcome challenges related to ineffective orientation, inadequate resources, and inappropriate involvement of stakeholders, infrequent supervision, and a negative attitude by some stakeholders.

2.6.1. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to ineffective orientation of policies

In their study on Teacher Educators' Understanding and Experiences with Implementing the Initial Primary Teacher Education Policy in Malawi, Chirwa et al (2023) recommended that key stakeholders should consider re-training of the teacher educators so that the problem of ineffective orientation is overcome. Further to this, Maluleke's (2015) study recommended staff development

to be an integral part of the policy implementation process. The development process provides staff with the tools and skills to perform the tasks associated with effective implementation. She further pointed out that failure to provide requisite training for the teachers and non-teaching staff responsible for policy implementation can hamper the policy.

2.6.2. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to inadequate support and resources

Resource allocation is an important activity by managers that promotes the effective execution of plans and strategies (Nyadere, 2014). Shortage of resources could affect the way education policies are implemented. Nyadere further emphasised the need for education authorities to ensure that educational institutions are adequately funded to achieve the successful implementation of educational policies and objectives.

2.6.3. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to stakeholder involvement

Stefan et al (2023) point out that the school principals cannot fulfill the whole leadership role alone, hence the need for them to engage various stakeholders in the execution of their roles. The study by Charles and Sunday (2015) indicated that stakeholders' participation in education-related issues has a great impact on educational policy implementation towards attaining quality education. This is in line with the study by Yaro et al. (2017), who were examining the relevance of stakeholders in education policy implementation. They established that education stakeholders have a significant role to play in policy implementation. School Managers, therefore, need to understand how these key players are impacted by the school activities and their level of influence to enable the school to achieve its goals and vision (Amos et. al, 2008). Several studies indicate that parental and community participation and involvement in education have a positive influence

on education policy implementation and a child's academic outcomes (Sakaue et al, 2023; Reinke, 2013).

2.6.4. Strategies used to overcome challenges related to infrequent supervision

Sudarni (2021) emphasised the importance of supervision of the implementation of education policies by responsible stakeholders on a regular basis. He pointed out that regular supervision would show that the education authorities, like the Ministry of Education officials, are serious about the need to implement the education policies. This is not quite different from the findings of Wardiah (2020), who established that regular supervision helps the implementers as well as the supervisors themselves in gaining knowledge about day-to-day operations in order to effectively implement the school's objectives.

Growing research established that School Managers need to regularly monitor and evaluate policy implementation (Maluleke, 2015; Hope, 2002). Monitoring involves inspection to determine if implementers are achieving the results intended by the policy. In the course of monitoring, the data from the indicators of the implementation process ought to be reviewed to determine whether the process is on the right track or not. School Managers need to take appropriate action following the results of the evaluation process.

2.6.5. Strategies used to overcome negative attitudes by some stakeholders

In order to overcome opposition to policy implementation, the School Managers must use an encouragement strategy. Here, Jacobs et al (2011) point to praise and positive feedback as two forms of encouragement that provide motivation and support to teachers and non-teaching staff.

Encouragement boosts confidence and conveys trust and a belief that the implementer can perform the task.

School Managers ought to empower stakeholders to fully participate in the implementation of education policies like the national education standards. Without empowerment, people feel disconnected, undervalued, and ultimately not engaged in their work (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997). Everard and Morris (1996) share similar sentiments in this regard when they assert that heads and senior staff in schools have a responsibility to help everyone concerned to discover and conceptualize the true nature of change and how it impinges on everyone in an institution.

2.7. Studies on challenges facing the implementation of education policies like the National Education Standards

Worldwide, several studies have been conducted on the implementation of education policies. In this section, only a few studies will be reviewed in order to provide some reference points in this evaluation. Some of the studies conducted worldwide are as follows:

2.7.1. Education policy implementation in America

In the USA, Spillane JP (2005) conducted a study to assess the implementation of new education standards for teaching Mathematics and Science in various districts of Michigan State. The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of new education standards for teaching Mathematics and Science was facing a number of challenges. Some of the challenges discovered were a lack of training in Mathematics and Science by most teachers, under-resourcing of most

schools, poor cooperation amongst various key stakeholders, as well as failure to find reasonable criteria for monitoring standards use in districts and schools. The challenges faced resulted in school leaders and teachers failing to properly understand the standards.

For the purpose of improving the implementation of the new education standards for teaching Mathematics and Science, the study made the following recommendations: retraining of school leaders on standards implementation, provision of adequate resources to schools, and intensifying stakeholders' cooperation and support.

2.7.2. Education policy implementation in Asia (Thailand)

In Thailand, Champucot (2011) conducted a study on factors affecting educational policy implementation effectiveness in three provinces of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The findings of the study revealed that the schools in these provinces had fulfilled their educational policy goals in terms of the improvement of student performance. The study further revealed that a number of factors affected educational policy implementation. Chief among such factors were policy objectives, the implementing agency's capability, resources, incentives, students' family economic condition, the cultural factor of parental support, and safety concerns. The study recommended that there should be improvement on safety measures for academic personnel and security forces, increasing resources for schools, strengthening the schools' capability, encouraging parental support of children's schooling, and having clear and relevant educational policies and suitable incentives for all academic personnel.

2.7.3. Education policy implementation in South Africa

Maluleke (2015) conducted a study on Curriculum Policy Implementation in the South African Education Context. The study was aimed at developing an understanding of what influences teachers in their attempt to implement the curriculum policy on environmental education in the classroom. The study revealed factors affecting policy implementation, opportunities for effective policy implementation, as well as approaches thereof.

The study established that curriculum policy implementation faced a number of constraints and challenges, namely, implementers' apathy towards the policy, lack of resources, insufficient time for implementation, and disagreements about how to achieve results. The study identified School Managers as being key in every aspect of school life. Maluleke's findings were in agreement with those of Hope (2002), who emphasised that for successful policy implementation, school principals should enhance the educational policy, conceptualise the policy in the school context, provide staff development for successful policy implementation, provide encouragement, and monitor and evaluate policy implementation.

Still in South Africa, Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) conducted a study on the role of School Managers in the implementation of Continuous Assessment (CASS) in Mopani District. The study established that the implementation of the CASS in Mopani District was facing a number of challenges. Therefore, the study concluded that training in parent management, learner management, monitoring and support, staff motivation, conflict management, and instructional leadership is required for School Managers in Mopani district to address challenges confronting

the implementation of CASS. In addition, training should be provided to School Managers, particularly school principals, in the new management role of providing resources which will enable learners to learn better and educators to facilitate learning and assess better.

2.7.4. Education policy implementation in Malawi

Chirwa et al (2023) conducted a study on Teacher Educators' Understanding and Experiences with Implementing the Initial Primary Teacher Education Policy in Malawi. The study found that the implementation of the revised IPTE curriculum is constrained by ineffective re-education and orientation of lecturers to the revised curriculum, unavailability of qualified lecturers, the duration and mode of training, lack of teaching and learning resources, and Teacher Educators who are not being supported by the Ministry of Education Officials. To mitigate the identified constraints, the study recommended that key stakeholders should consider re-training of the teacher educators, provision of adequate resources for the implementation of the curriculum, and regularly supporting the college principals and Teacher Educators.

The Ministry of Education in Malawi developed the National Education Standards in 2015 in order to improve the quality of education in all primary, secondary, and teacher educational institutions. School Managers are supposed to play a greater role in ensuring that all the standards are effectively implemented. This study was set out to establish whether secondary School Managers are implementing the National Education Standards policy as stipulated by the framers of the policy. It was further aimed at establishing whether the secondary School Managers are facing similar challenges faced by the implementation of other education policies as found by Chirwa et

al (2023), Maluleke (2015), Ramalepe and Zengele (201), and Spillane (2005). Considering that all these studies did not specifically dwell on how School Managers are implementing National Education Standards, this study was conceived to fill this gap in the literature.

2.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on reviewing literature concerning the school management's role in the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement. Relevant literature on national education standards, general management and leadership, educational management, as well as school improvement has been reviewed. The review has established how education management relates to education standards and school improvement. It has also revealed a number of factors that hinder the implementation of education policies, as well as the strategies School Managers could use in overcoming such challenges to facilitate education policy implementation. The review concluded by analysing several studies conducted in different parts of the world on education policy implementation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This section describes the method that was used for collecting the research data, including research design, sampling procedures, and data analysis as guided by the cognitive theory.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative, multiple case study design and document review of action plans. The qualitative research uses methods of data collection and analysis that are not quantitative in nature and aims at exploring or describing experiences of the respondents (Creswell, 2014). This study complied with qualitative research approach because qualitative research is interested in gaining insight and understanding of a phenomenon. Creswell (2014) described qualitative research as an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world. This study satisfied these descriptions because data was collected in the natural setting and interpreted in order to construct meaning from the data. The aim of this study therefore, was to investigate the role School Managers were playing in the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement, which was in accordance with qualitative research approach.

In a case study, a single case is studied in depth, which could be an individual, a group, an institution, a program or a concept (Polit et al., 2008). A case study design has a potential to enable the study of things in detail and explain why certain things happen (Creswell, 2014). This study was a case study because it focused on sixteen School Managers in four secondary schools. The

sampled School Managers were three heads of departments at each school (responsible for Humanities, Languages and Sciences), four head-teachers in the four selected secondary schools. The use of multiple cases in this study created opportunities for within-case and across-case approaches of data analysis to be done and to determine the worthiness of the study (Creswell, 2014). Case studies however, are faulted for questionable credibility of generalizations. There is a perception that there is a general difficulty in defining boundaries of the cases, problems of negotiating access to study settings and the effect of the observer on the natural setting (Denscombe, 2003). However, this is a simplistic way of looking at case studies based on some misunderstandings. Such misunderstanding can be the belief that all research should always aim at generalizable findings. Such a belief contradicts the important role that specific information about particular case helps in understanding the phenomena.

This study was basically a multiple case study as opposed to a single case study. A multiple case study requires a researcher to collect similar data in order to compare and contrast the problem in multiple environments (Leedy & Omro, 2015; Gustafson, 2017). The method was used because each of the participating schools was assumed to have a different culture and mode of working. The case study method uncovers the how, the why, and the results of an implemented phenomenon and allows for in-depth exploration (Cresswell, 2014; Newman, 2014).

3.2 Research Paradigm

The study used interpretivism padigm as the data collected in a natural setting was interpreted to construct meaning from the data (Cresswell, 2014). Interpretivism uses qualitative research

methods that focus on individuals' beliefs, motivation, and reasoning over to gain understanding of social interaction.

3.3 Study Site

The study was carried out in public secondary schools in the Central East Education Division (CEED). This targeted four secondary schools in Salima district. The selection of the schools was done through purposive sampling. The setting or site of the research and schools were selected with a view that they would provide the desired data.

3.3.1 Description of research sites.

The research was conducted in four public secondary schools in the Salima district. The secondary schools involved in this study included all categories of secondary schools in Malawi. These secondary schools are described in detail below in terms of their environment, resources, community, and management.

Table 3. 1 Description of Research Sites

	A	B	C	D
LOCATION	5km from Salima town	8km from Salima town	Located in Salima township	15 km from Salima town
ENVIRONMENT	432 students (254 boys and 178 girls)	355 students (185 boys and 170 girls)	606 students (313 boys and 293 girls)	464 students (309 boys and 155 girls)
RESOURCES	8 classrooms and 4 science laboratories	4 classrooms and no science laboratory	8 classrooms and one science laboratory	12 classrooms and 4 science laboratories
COMMUNITY	Learners were selected from all primary schools in the Salima district	Learners selected from nearby primary schools	Learners selected from nearby primary schools	Learners were selected from all primary schools in the Salima district

3.3.2 Management

The organizational structure of the four schools is quite similar. It consists of the head teacher, deputy head teacher, heads of departments, bursar, senior teachers, teachers, and support staff. Teachers are given some responsibilities, such as being in a committee responsible for examination, discipline, sports, entertainment, timetable, and welfare. The committees are responsible for day to day running of different activities at the school. The head teacher is

responsible to the Education Division Manager. However, he is an ex-official member of an elected school committee that runs the school. The organizational structure of the secondary schools is summarized in Figure 3.1 below.

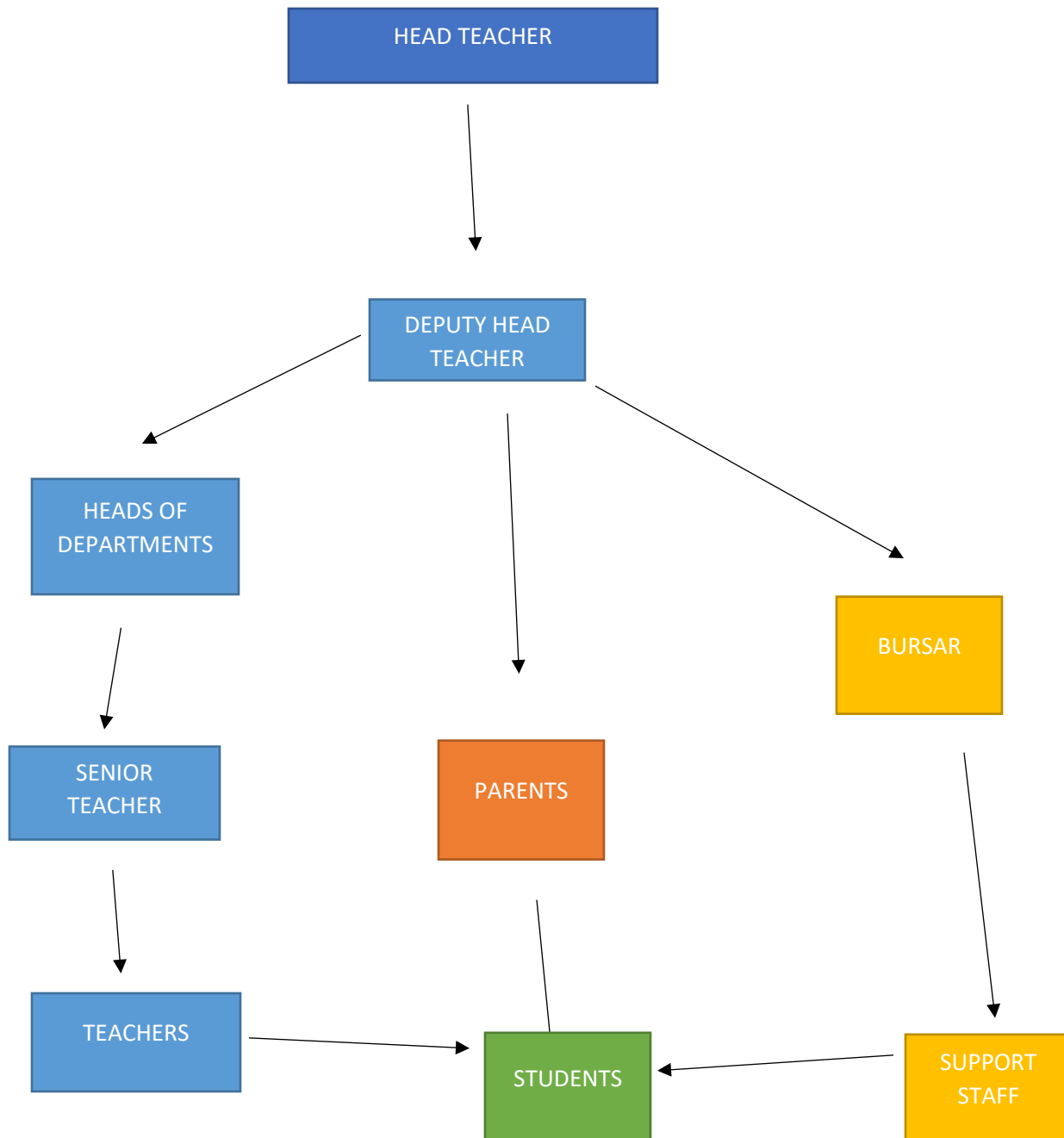


Figure 3.1: Secondary school organizational structure

3.4 Study Population

The study targeted secondary School Managers in Salima district and Central East Education Division Quality Assurance Officers.

3.5 Sample Size

The targeted participants of this study were sixteen School Managers and two Quality Assurance Officers from the Central East Education Division. For each school, a head teacher and three heads of departments were interviewed. The School Managers were purposively selected because they form part of the school management.

Head-teachers are key role players in ensuring the effective implementation of government policies at the school. They are the chief supervisors of policy implementation, like the National Education Standards, at the school level. This necessitated the choice of a purposeful sampling approach in collecting data for this study, as it assisted in collecting the needed data for the study.

The heads of departments were involved in the study because they are key role players in ensuring effective policy implementation in their respective departments. This is because they are involved in managing the departments in which they carry out their role as supervisors of teachers, ensuring that teachers effectively implement the standards (Government of Malawi, 2014). The heads of departments are also part of school management and act as advisers to the head teacher and deputy

head teacher, as far as the implementation of the standards is concerned. The involvement of departmental heads enabled the researcher to establish the type of leadership School Managers were employing in the implementation of the standards. Table 3.2 below gives the proposed minimum sample size:

Table 3.2: Sample size for the research.

Participants	Numbers
Head teachers	04
Heads of Departments	12
QAOs	02
Total	18

3.5.1 Description of the participants

This section presents the characteristics of the participants in this study. The participants in this study were the head teachers, the heads of departments, and the division's quality assurance officers. The characteristics are discussed in detail below.

3.5.2 Characteristics of head teachers.

This study involved both male and female head teachers. Three secondary schools involved in this study were headed by male head teachers and one by a female counterpart. The head teachers involved in this study had taught in secondary schools for twelve to twenty-six years and had

served in that position for three to fifteen years. The head teachers were holding academic qualifications of degrees in Education. Table 3.3 below summarizes the characteristics of the head teachers who participated in the study.

Table 3.3: Characteristics of Head teachers

H/TEACHER	S C H	S E X	A G E	QUALIFICATION	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	H/TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE
1	A	M	43	Bachelor of Education	16	7
2	B	F	38	Bachelor of Education	12	3
3	C	M	56	Bachelor of Education	26	15
4	D	F	48	Bachelor of Education	18	10

3.5.3 Characteristics of heads of departments

Twelve heads of departments (for Humanities, Languages, and Sciences) also participated in this study as they are part of the School Managers. Their ages ranged from thirty-five to fifty-four, and three of them were females, and nine were males. Their teaching experiences ranged from nine to thirty-two years, and they have been in the position of the head of department from two to thirteen years. Their professional grades ranged from TJ (POE) to TH (P8), and they have academic qualifications ranging from a Diploma in Education to a Bachelor of Education or Arts with a University Certificate in Education. Table 3.4 summarizes the characteristics of heads of departments.

Table 3.4: Characteristics of heads of departments:

H O D	DEPT	S C H	S E X	A G E	G R A D E	QUALIFICATION	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	EXPERIENCE AS HOD
1	Humanities	A	M	51	TH	Master of Education in Psychology	22	7
2	Languages	A	M	49	TI	Bachelor of Education	18	10
3	Science	A	M	53	TH	Bachelor of Education	24	13
4	Humanities	B	M	37	TI	Bachelor of Education	10	5
5	Languages	B	F	44	TI	Diploma in Education	18	11
6	Science	B	M	35	TI	Bachelor of Education	9	2
7	Humanities	C	M	47	TJ	Diploma in Education	14	7
8	Languages	C	M	36	TI	Bachelor of Education	11	3
9	Science	C	F	55	TI	Bachelor of Education	32	10
10	Humanities	D	M	43	TI	Diploma in Education	12	5
11	Languages	D	F	46	TH	Bachelor of Education	15	9
12	Science	D	M	51	TH	Bachelor of Education	22	12

The study has found that the male heads of departments (HODs) who participated in this study were more than the female HODs, as nine out of twelve heads of departments who participated in this study were males and three were females. It has also been established that the science department had more male HODs than females. For instance, out of four science heads of departments, three were males, and one was a female.

The HODs who participated in this study taught for nine to thirty-two years. They had served at their current positions from two to thirteen years. This indicates that the heads of departments were supposed to have enough knowledge and skills to supervise the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement.

The heads of departments who participated in this study held academic qualifications ranging from a diploma in Education to a Master of Education. Three of them were holding diplomas in Education, seven were holding degrees in Education, and one was holding a Master's degree in Education Psychology.

3.5.4 *Characteristics of Quality Assurance Officers.*

All the Quality Assurance Officers had more than ten years' experience working in their positions. One officer had a Master's degree in Sociology of Education, while the other had a degree in Arts plus a University Certificate of Education. All this means that both officers were qualified enough to be at their posts.

Table 3.5: Characteristics of QAO

Q A O	DIVISION	S E X	A G E	G R A D E	QUALIFICATION	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	EXPERI ENCE AS QAO	Number of Schools to supervise
1	CEED	M	50	F	Bachelor of Arts and UCE	26	13	150
2	CEED	M	45	F	Med in Sociology of Education	7	12	150

3.6 Sampling Technique

The setting or site of the research and schools were selected with a view that they would provide the desired data. The sampling approaches for the research site and participants are described in detail below:

3.6.1 *Research Site*

The study was conducted in the Central East Education Division. The division covers five districts, namely: Kasungu, Dowa, Ntchisi, Salima, and Nkhotakota. Four secondary schools from the Salima district were selected. The district was conveniently selected with consideration of time and resource constraints. However, the nature and characteristics of the schools selected from the

district are not quite distinct from those of other schools from the remaining four districts in the division.

3.6.2 School sample

The four schools involved in the study were purposely and simply randomly sampled. Two of the schools involved in the study were district secondary schools and hence purposely sampled as the district has only two district boarding secondary schools. The other two schools were Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS), and these were sampled using simple random sampling, given that all CDSS in the district are not quite different. The district secondary schools and CDSSs have different contextual factors that affect the implementation of the national education standards.

3.6.3 Participants sample

The key participants of this study were sixteen School Managers of the four secondary schools. The sample of the study is purposive because the chosen participants are members of the school management who are supposed to be key role players in the implementation of the National Education Standards. In purposive sampling, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002).

The School Managers were sampled because the researcher specializes in Educational Leadership and Management. The School Managers involved in this study were four Head teachers and twelve heads of departments. Head-teachers are key role players in ensuring the effectiveness of the

implementation of the National Education Standards, for they are the chief supervisors of curriculum implementation at a school level. Therefore, purposeful sampling was the most suitable approach in collecting data for this study because it assisted in collecting the needed data for the study.

The heads of departments were purposely sampled because they are key role players in ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation of the National Education Standards. This is because they are involved in managing the departments in which they carry out their role as supervisors of teachers to ensure that teachers are effectively implementing the national education standards in their respective classrooms (Government of Malawi, 2014).

3.7 Data Collection Methods

For this study, data were collected from two different sources: action plans from the participants' schools and semi-structured interviews with the participants. These methods were chosen because they provided the necessary information that helped the researcher gain insight into an understanding of the School Managers' role in the implementation of the National Education Standards. These methods were in line and consistent with the qualitative research methods. In addition to that, the methods complemented each other to provide methodological triangulation in the study (Creswell, 2014). Methodological triangulation helped to cross-check the credibility and worthiness of the data in this study.

3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

These semi-structured interviews were in the form of heads of departments' interviews, head teachers' interviews, and QAO's interviews. These interviews were individual and "semi-structured." The individual interviews were adopted in this study over group interviews because the interviewees had more freedom to express their thoughts, especially on their perceptions of the strategies and challenges facing the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

The study used semi-structured interviews because they are effective for consulting and discussing with key participants involved in the implementation of the National Education Standards. Here, the questions can be prepared ahead of time to make the interviewer appear competent during the interview. This is where the interviewer generally starts with some defined questioning plan, but pursues a more conversational style, which may see questions answered in an order merely natural to the flow of the conversation. The interviewee, on the other hand, had the freedom to say whatever came to his or her mind (Cohen & Manion, 1986). The study followed the procedure of semi-structured interviews as described by Creswell (2014) in interviewing the sampled participants of the study. The data collection instruments have been discussed in detail below:

3.7.2 Official document review

The study of official documents involved the review of the National Education Standards document and the study of the action plans of the selected School Managers. The National

Education Standards document provided a guide on how schools should be assessed in the implementation of the standards, as well as an outline of all the specific standards chosen.

Action plans outlining implementation plans and possible strategies were used to examine the intended National Education Standards implementation strategies for each school. Knowledge of these strategies provided me with a clear direction for follow-up questions during the interview process. A deeper understanding of the documents also provided the researcher with a big picture overview of the initiatives as well as a shared vocabulary to use with the participants during interviews.

The methods used in this study provided ample data from a combination of individual interviews of school leaders and document reviews of action plans related to the implementation of National Education Standards. Semi-structured interviews with the school leaders allowed for greater understanding of their selected strategies for implementation of the standards, resulting in the successes or challenges of the initiative. Use of multiple data sources contributed to a more reliable study by ensuring that the results of the interviews and corresponding document reviews were matched.

3.8 Data Collection Tools

3.8.1 Heads of Departments' interview guide

An interview guide was used to investigate heads of departments' implementation practices of the National Education Standards (see Appendix 1). The guide sought to elicit the following information:

- i. Identity of the secondary school.
- ii. Head of department's teaching experience
- iii. Experience as a head of department
- iv. Head of department's knowledge of the national education standards.
- v. The heads of departments' strategies in the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement.
- vi. The status of the implementation process in the school.

My supervisor and some educators checked my interview guide to ascertain if it would elicit desired information. In addition to my supervisor and other educators, before administering the interview guide, it was piloted to some heads of department. The pilot results assisted me in refining the interview guide.

3.8.2 Head teacher interview guide.

The Head teacher interview guide sought to elicit the following information:

- i. Identity of the secondary school.
- ii. Head teachers' teaching experience.

- iii. Head teachers' experience as a school head.
- iv. The status of the implementation of the national education standards.
- v. The school's capacity to implement the national education standards.

3.8.3 *Quality Assurance Officers interview guide.*

The interview guide for the division's Quality and Assurance Officers was formulated to establish the following:

- i. Identity of the education division
- ii. Officer's teaching experience
- iii. Experience as a Quality and Assurance Officer
- iv. Responsibilities regarding the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.
- v. The status of their supervision of the implementation of National Education Standards for school improvement.

3.9 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. According to Creswell (2014), this method of data analysis is described as a way of analysing data by organizing it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, or similar features. Therefore, the data was first categorised into themes. From the themes, codes were developed. According to Cornbleth (1990), coding is the process of dividing or segmenting data into topics or categories. This involved: beginning with open coding, reading through the entire text to form a global view of the content; moving to segment units of meaning through sentences or phrases; labelling these units of meaning, grouping

them into codes; and finally into categories. The coding procedure assists in reducing and categorising a large quantity of data into more meaningful units for interpretation.

3.10 Credibility and trustworthiness

The study used two methods of data collection and twelve interviews to provide methodological triangulation. The final results of the study were taken back to the participants for them to check whether the results reflected what they contributed to the research. The results of the study provided many perspectives on the themes based on what the participants said about them.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

The researcher first got a clearance from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC), as well as permission from the Central East Education Division Manager and the head teachers of the targeted schools, before starting to collect data. Consent was gained from respondents immediately before conducting the interviews. The respondents were informed about the aim of the study and the need for their participation. The participants were assured that the information provided by them would be treated with confidentiality. In respect of their privacy, pseudonyms have been used, and each participant signed a consent form for acceptance. Participants and their schools have not been named in the subsequent research report. The identities of respondents were not known to the researcher, as they were not asked to indicate their names or position in the school.

3.12 Chapter Summary

The study on the School Managers' implementation of the national education standards for school improvement used a qualitative approach and employed a case study design. The study purposefully and simply randomly sampled the site, schools, and participants. It also used document review and face-to-face interviews. Data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 *Introduction*

This chapter presents the key findings of the factors affecting and challenges facing School Managers in the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement.

4.1 School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement

This study aimed to investigate the School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement in four secondary schools in Salima district. Spillane's (2002) cognitive perspective on policy implementation guided the framing of this study. Bearing in mind that the study was conducted eight years after the National Education Standards were introduced, it was expected that School Managers were, by this time, guiding their subordinates in implementing the National Education Standards to effectively improve their schools. However, the study has revealed that out of the twelve leadership and management education standards available, schools are still struggling to implement many of these standards. Findings of the study are presented in three themes that are also in line with the three specific objectives of the study. Firstly, the status of the implementation of the National Education Standards for secondary school improvement will be discussed. Presentation of the analysis of challenges that School Managers are facing in the implementation of National Education Standards for secondary school improvement will follow. The final part will dwell on possible strategies for improving the implementation of the National Education Standards for ensuring secondary school improvement. The key findings, together with discussions, are presented in the sub-sections below.

4.2. The status of the implementation of the National Education Standards for secondary school improvement.

The Ministry of Education developed the National Education Standards in 2015 to improve the quality of education in primary schools, secondary schools, and Teacher Training Colleges. The overall purpose of the National Education Standards is to improve several areas of school operations, like students' performance, teachers' performance, as well as school infrastructure (NES, 2015). Effective implementation of the standards very much depends on the appropriate management strategies that the school leadership is putting in place. Of more significance amongst all the 26 education standards formulated are the 12 standards which concentrate on the role of school management and leadership in improving the affairs of the school, which is the focus of the study. The aim of this study, therefore, was to find out the role School Managers are playing in the implementation of the National Education Standards for secondary school improvement in four selected secondary schools in Salima District.

The findings of the study and discussions on specific objective one: the status of the implementation of the national education standards, are presented in detail below.

4.2.1. Assessment of the implementation of specific standards for leadership and management

A checklist was developed for School Managers to state whether they were implementing the specific standards for leadership and management at their school. From the checklist of schools'

implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement, data have shown that most of the schools were struggling to implement the standards and that there were disparities from school to school in terms of how the standards were being implemented by the schools. QAO 2 also agreed with these findings as he said: *“Our inspection of the schools shows disparities in the implementation of the National Education Standards across different schools and districts, something which leads to inequitable educational opportunities in the school”* (14/12/23). The QAO 1 also testified to this outcome by saying that: *“However, inspections show that some requirements are not being met by schools, indicating that some schools are not implementing the National Education Standards as expected”* (14/12/23).

Out of the checklist of the implementation of the twelve leadership and management standards, five sub-themes were established and are discussed below.

4.2.2. Establishment and implementation of school vision and goals

National education standard number 15 requires that every school, like any other organisation, should always have a specific vision, goals, or values that they are following. Data revealed that all the schools studied had their own vision and goals, which most of the managers, especially head teachers, were able to explain. For instance, the head teacher for school A said that the vision for their school was: *“to be a centre that produces students equipped with knowledge, skills and values for self-reliance and contribute to society with compassion and wisdom”* (12/10/23). The head teacher for school C also mentioned the vision of their school as: *“to be a catalyst for social and economic development and growth”* (27/10/23).

The head teachers of all the four schools were also able to mention some of the goals that their schools were pursuing in that academic year. For instance, the head teacher for school D mentioned one of the goals of their school as: “...to maximise academic achievement and to increase the pass rate of students with MSCE highest score of 7 points” (07/11/23). She said that they are striving to get a single digit of at least seven points in the national examinations of the Malawi School Certificate Examination. Despite the head teachers’ ability to mention and accurately explain the vision and goals of their respective schools, nine out of the twelve heads of departments had problems in explaining the vision of their schools, and seven of them had difficulties in explaining the goals that their respective schools were pursuing.

Knowledge of the vision and goals of an organisation is essential to the leaders as they are the immediate supervisors of their implementation. As NES 15 requires learning institutions to have their visions and goals, which they are pursuing, it is obvious that a lack of knowledge of such visions and goals would make it quite difficult for the standards to be effectively implemented. In fact, the cognitive theory hints that uncertainty about the goals of the organisation is one of the factors that make implementation of a policy like the National Education Standards fail. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school leaders to make the subordinates understand and embrace the vision and goals of the school. All this rests on the need for the School Managers (head teachers, deputy head teachers, and heads of departments) to first have a thorough understanding of the school’s vision and goals. Some researchers, like Gurley et al (2013), mentioned that the key to improving the schools’ quality is for the School Managers at the school level to build and understand the vision, mission, goals, and values for the school. This is also in line with the

findings of Ahanhanzo et al (2006), who concluded that having a common vision and goals for education indicates a level of transparency that is advantageous for all stakeholders at the school.

Having a well-crafted vision or goal for a school is not enough, but also the need to communicate them to the relevant stakeholders. The data revealed that despite all schools showing availability of their vision and goals, only schools A and D had their visions and goals displayed at the schools' reception for easy viewing of all the stakeholders. For instance, at the front of the head teacher's office in school A there was a billboard showing the school motto and mission statement as well as the service charter. This is a commendable way of communicating the vision and goals of the school to stakeholders on a daily basis. The picture is shown in figure 4.1 below.

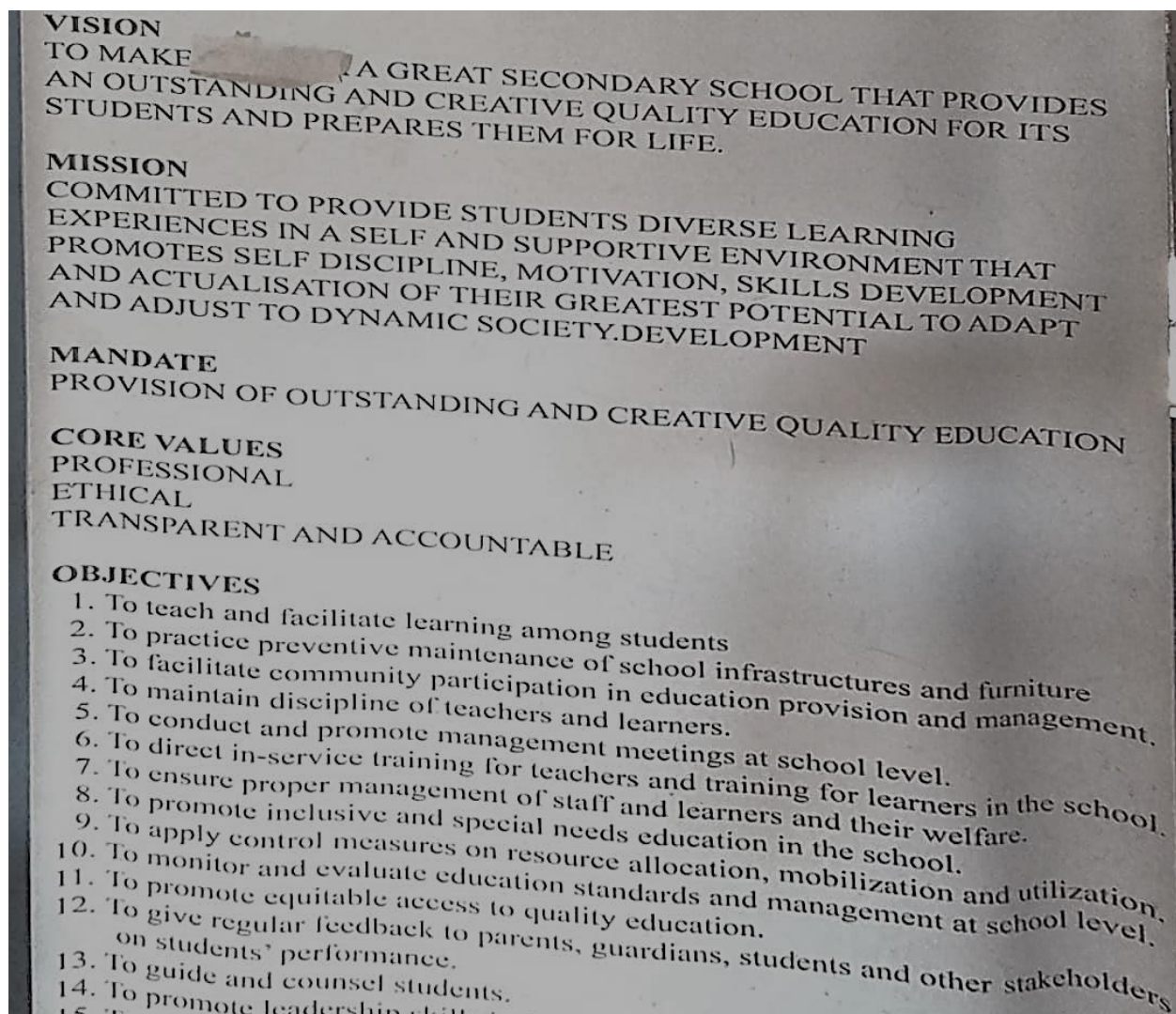


Figure 4.1: Showing the vision of school A.

However, schools B and C did not have their visions and goals displayed at places where stakeholders could easily access. After being asked how they make stakeholders aware of the school vision, goals, and values, the head teacher for school B said: “We explain our vision and goals to the parents and traditional leaders during PTA meetings” (20/10/23). The head of department for languages in school C said that: “We make teachers aware of the school vision and

goals during staff meetings and caucuses. As for students, we tell them during school assemblies”
(29/10/23)

Stakeholders need to have access to the school’s vision, goals, and values. As Spillane’s (2002) cognitive framework emphasises, other role players in education at the school level need to be sensitised or enlightened about what the standards mean to them at the school if they are to effectively participate in the implementation process. This should start with effectively communicating to them about the vision, goals, and values of the institution. It is the responsibility of School Managers to make sure that the vision, goals, and values of the school are displayed for all stakeholders to easily view whenever they visit the school. Awareness of the school’s vision, goals, and values should inform the stakeholders on how they can participate in the school’s implementation of the national education standards. Effective communication of the vision and goals of the school to relevant stakeholders enhances their acceptance of them and hence improves the attainment of such vision and goals.

Acceptance of the vision and goals of the school is not only enhanced by the communication to the relevant stakeholders, but also by their participation in the formulation and review of such vision and goals. As it turns out, from the data, all the schools studied had problems involving stakeholders in the formulation of their vision and goals. Only schools B and D claimed to involve teachers in this process, while schools A and C seemed only to involve members of the school management at the school. None of the four schools studied gave evidence of involving outside stakeholders like parents and members of the community in the formulation or review of their

vision and goals as revealed by the head teacher for school B; *“We do not necessarily involve parents or community members when formulating the vision and goals. The management and all teachers come up with these during meetings”* (20/10/23). These sentiments were equally shared by the other schools’ managers.

It is important that the formulation process of the vision and goals of the school involves all the stakeholders so that they can easily adopt them. In their study on participation of stakeholders in the planning of strategies, Gustafsson, Ivner, and Palm (2015) concluded that limited participation in the process of planning had an influence on the impact and legitimacy of the strategies of the organisation. In fact, Wilson (2013) posts that involving key personnel like stakeholders in the strategy formulation process creates ownership and support by all players, which is crucial for the success during the implementation stage. The acceptance of the school’s vision and goals is enhanced if the said stakeholders participate in the formulation process. The most important stakeholders of the school to be involved are teachers, parents, and the members of the community. The parents may be represented by the PTA, while community leaders, like chiefs, may represent the community.

Another area that schools have struggled to implement is the frequency of reviewing the vision and goals of the school. Schools A and D indicated that they do conduct a review of their vision and goals on a termly basis, School B said that they do an annual review, while School C did not clearly state how often they conduct their reviews. This has been displayed in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Frequency of Reviewing Vision and Goals of Schools

School	Frequency of Reviewing Vision/Goals
A	Termly
B	Yearly
C	None
D	Termly

As it turns out from the study, some schools do not review their vision and goals on a regular basis. This has a danger of such vision and goals ending up being irrelevant to what the school is doing. The process of reviewing the goals and vision of the school, like any other organisation, needs to be done regularly. This will enable the School Managers to know areas that need improvement.

4.2.3. School self-evaluation and improvement

National Education Standard 16 requires schools to conduct self-evaluation to improve in the various areas of their operations. For effective implementation of the standards, schools are required to use the standards in identifying areas where improvement is needed and build the necessary action into their improvement plans. Schools need to focus on areas of weakness identified through the use of the standards and improve them through the school improvement planning process (NES, 2015). Therefore, schools should have Improvement plans (IP), which will be achieved through the implementation of the NES. Data has shown that all the schools had improvement plans except school B, whose head teacher expressed no knowledge of having an

improvement plan at their school: “I’m not sure if we have a written improvement plan in the office” (20/10/23). As evidence of the presence of an improvement plan, the head of department for sciences in school D showed his action plan, which is displayed in Figure 4.2 below.

2020/ 2021 TERM II ACTION PLAN FOR HEAD OF DEPT: SCIENCES

KEY RESULT AREA	ACTIVITY	STRATEGIES	OBJECTIVE	TARGET GROUP	INDICATOR	TIME FRAME
Departmental pass rate of 50% (poor performers) and 80% / above (gifted students)	-Effectively supervising delivery of lessons in the department.	-Ensuring necessary records like schemes and records of work are available for each teacher for each subject. -Providing guidance and counselling especially to poor performers.	-To produce good results in Science subjects.	All science teachers	-Increased pass rate in Science subjects -Active participation of students in Science and Maths club activities.	-From week one onwards -Termly
Implementation of the National education standards	-Ensuring that there is participation of teachers and students in school activities.	-Making sure that all teachers are dedicated to their work. -Ensuring that every prefect takes responsibility of checking juniors' behavior. Empowering parents and community leaders to participate in meeting the school vision and goals.	-To ensure that teachers' and students' living conditions are improved. -To ensure parents and the community participate in school improvement.	All teachers, students and other stakeholders.	-Well cleaned school surroundings. -Safe environment of the school. -Improved cooperation amongst teachers and students. -Improved school infrastructure	-From week one to end of term. -Termly
Very organized students in both curricular and extra-curricular activities	-Ensuring that students are punctual to every school programme.	-Ensure personal punctuality -Identifying late comers and absconders punishment by empowering prefects and study circle group leaders. -Supervising students' leaders.	-To improve time management by both students and teachers.	-All students. -All Members of staff	-Well organized preps and study circles.	-From week one end of term. -Termly

Figure 4.2: An extract of an action plan

A school improvement plan is a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthens the school’s capacity for managing change (Ferguson et al, 2000). In this case, school improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching and learning processes and the conditions that support them. The availability of the school improvement plan, whose implementation is outlined in an action plan, is the School Managers’ message of their desire to improve various areas of the school operations.

Data has also shown that all three schools that revealed to have improvement plans involved stakeholders in the process of formulating such improvement plans. However, there were differences in terms of the nature of the stakeholders involved. While school A and D did involve the teachers, BOG, and PTA members in the formulation of the improvement plans, school C relied much on the internal stakeholders (School Managers and teachers). This was well claimed by the head of department for humanities in school B: *“We normally use the head teacher, deputy head, HODs, and a few selected teachers to formulate the improvement plan”* (22/10/23). The head of department for languages in school C also did not see the need for involving outside stakeholders in the formulation of improvement plans: *“It takes a lot of time and resources to involve stakeholders from outside the school in such processes.”* (29/10/23)

Data has shown that despite schools having improvement plans, the way in which these plans were formulated may tend to make their implementation difficult. Implementation of an education policy like the National Education Standards requires the involvement of all key role players. As the cognitive theory stipulates, the implementation of a policy can fail, sometimes not because of the unwillingness of the implementers, but perhaps because their ability to implement is hampered by their failure to understand what the policy means (Brynard, 2002). Failure to involve all stakeholders in formulating the improvement plans may negatively affect the implementation of such plans, as some key role players may not participate. Sulastris et al (2020) observed that schools that do not fully engage all stakeholders in the formulation of their plans will find it difficult to carry out various continuous improvement efforts effectively. Therefore, for parents and the

community to fully participate in the implementation process, School Managers must involve them in the formulation of the improvement plans.

NES 16 also requires schools to evaluate their standards on a regular basis. This is where School Managers assess the NES implementation process either during the course of implementing the NES or at the end of the process. Assessment done during the process of implementing the NES would enable the School Managers to detect any deviations from the planned course of action, and for corrections to be made in advance. At the end of implementing the NES, the School Managers may assess the process to determine whether the NES has been implemented as desired.

Data revealed that self-evaluation rarely happens in schools due to a number of reasons, the notable ones being workload and lack of understanding. For instance, the head of department for languages in school A cited workload as the reason why they failed to review the implementation of the NES at their school. *“We’re mostly busy as the workload is too much. This makes us not evaluate the implementation of the policy frequently”* (15/10/23).

The head of the department for humanities in school C mentioned a lack of understanding of the need and mode of evaluating the implementation process of the national education standards for school improvement. *“We do not actually understand whether we should be the ones evaluating the NES implementation”* (29/10/23).

As it turns out from the study, schools rarely conduct school self-evaluation (SSE) of their improvement plans on a regular basis. Every plan set needs to have a time frame of implementation, after which a review will be done. This review may show the School Managers whether they are implementing the improvement plan in the right way or not. It is through these regular reviews that adjustments to the plan are made. In their study, Hofman et al (2009) observed that the effects of School Self-evaluation on school quality were strongly driven by schools' desire to improve. Research further indicates that school self-evaluation can have a positive impact on school improvement and outcomes for students (Caputo and Rastelli, 2014; Ferguson et al, 2000).

4.2.4. Staff supervision and development

As part of supervising and enhancing the capability of the members of staff in the implementation of the NES, data has revealed that three schools out of the four do conduct lesson observation. This is where heads of departments, deputy head teachers, or the head teachers observe lesson delivery of the teachers in order to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Effective lesson observation is normally done regularly. However, the three schools had differences in terms of the frequency of conducting lesson observation. In school A, data shows that the exercise is not done regularly. The head teacher for the school revealed this by saying that: *“As management, we do conduct lesson observation once in a while just because of the workload that we have at the school”* (12/10/23). The head of department for humanities in school A collaborated with the head teacher, as he said: *“It is difficult to conduct lesson observation regularly as we also have a lot of periods to teach as well.”* (15/10/23)

In school B, it was found that the School Managers conduct lesson observation once per term. The reasons given were not quite different from those of school A. For instance, the head of department for sciences in school B said that: *“Conducting lesson observation regularly, like once per week and would mean your own classes not being taught due to the workload available”* (20/10/23).

It was only in school D where data showed that lesson observation was being done regularly. The head teacher and even heads of departments claimed that this is done every week. The head teacher for school D said: *“We do allocate a week to a particular department to conduct lesson observation. We make sure that each of the three departments has at least two weeks per term for conducting lesson observation”* (07/11/23).

National Education Standard 20 requires School Managers to use lesson observation as one of the tools for supervising and developing staff members. Data has shown that School Managers rarely observe the lessons of the teachers. The cognitive theory cites limited supervision as one of the factors that hinder the implementation of an education policy. The theory claims that a negative attitude towards a policy may even prevent school managers from implementing it. As it turned out from this study, the negative attitude towards lesson observation and workload that the School Managers have led to irregular implementation of the NES.

School Managers and all teachers need to develop a positive attitude towards lesson observation by focusing on its advantages. One of the advantages of lesson observation is to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Teachers will be able to know where they are having problems

in lesson delivery so that they can be assisted accordingly. It is important to take lesson observation as a tool for one's improvement.

National Education Standard number 20 also points to a crucial area of School Managers' responsibility to conduct regular, documented appraisal of the work of members of staff. Despite three schools claiming to be conducting lesson observation, data shows that only school D was able to conduct regular, documented appraisal of the work of members of staff. The head teacher for the school revealed that this is done three times per term. On what action School Managers take following the results of the appraisal, data showed that it helps them in areas that need improvement. This is what the head teacher for school D said: *"Information that we get from staff appraisal enables us to make informed decisions on school improvement"* (07/11/23).

Data on the assessment of implementation of National Education Standard number 20: Staff supervision and development, has also revealed a shortfall of the schools in conducting regular, documented appraisal of the work of members of staff. This is where School Managers, especially head teachers or deputy head teachers, assess the overall work of a subordinate. This assessment is done in the presence of the subordinate. In their study on Continuous Assessment, Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) established that many managers have a negative attitude towards this practice as they would not want to offend the member being assessed.

School Managers and their subordinates need to understand the essence of having regular documented appraisals of the members of staff. The Ministry of Education uses the information

from these appraisals as a tool for promoting its employees. The information may also be used for the improvement of the employees' performance.

4.2.5. Care and welfare of students

National Education Standard 22 requires School Managers to ensure that students are learning in a safe environment and that their concerns are dealt with appropriately. Researchers like Maelan et al (2018) say that institutions can promote student well-being by providing a safe and respectful learning environment in which students feel heard, seen, and valued. They further say that schools may offer programs that support psychological health, such as counselling, mentoring, and social skills. As the cognitive theory considers the' attitude of the education policy implementers as one factor influencing effective implementation of a policy, it is important to ensure that the implementers are well motivated and have a positive attitude. Spillane (2002) considers students as one of the key players in the implementation of an educational policy.

As it turned out from the study, only in two schools were students regularly being briefed on their safety, while the other two schools were not actually doing this regularly. It was found that in schools A and C, this was being done during assemblies. This is what the head of department for sciences in school C said: *"We use the school assembly to notify the students about their safety as they are here at school"* (27/10/23). The head teacher for school A also gave examples of areas of safety where the students are briefed: *"Recently we had cases of cholera and COVID-19 19 which we were able to brief the students during assembly on what they should be doing to stay safe."* (12/10/23)

On the part of the welfare of students, data shows that all four schools have forums which students use to direct their concerns to the school management. In school A, a suggestion box is placed at the front of the head teacher's office. Students are encouraged to write their concerns and slot them in the suggestion box. Regularly, the members of the school management read these papers and discuss in their meetings on how to address those concerns. The head of department for languages in school A claimed that this system has proved to be effective: *"Students are very free to direct their concerns to management as they do not indicate their names on the papers they have put their issues on"* (15/10/23). The head of department for humanities also collaborated with his colleague by saying: *"We have seen a big improvement in how management and all members of staff deal with students' concerns as we can know them through the suggestion box"* (15/10/23). Establishment of a forum where students were free to anonymously write their concerns and slot them in the suggestion box made the students feel free to advance their concerns to the school authorities. Through the giving of feedback to the students, school leaders were able to resolve student issues of welfare and safety.

In school B, data show that the concerns about students' safety and abuse were being addressed by the Grievance and Awareness Management Committee. This is a committee that comprises the deputy head teacher, heads of departments, and other staff members. Its mandate is to hear and address students' grievances at the school. The head teacher for the school commended this arrangement as it ensures that a holistic approach is followed by the School Managers in addressing students' concerns. *"The grievance and awareness committee enables us as school management*

to have a holistic approach to the solving of students' complaints. The complaints are fully dealt with by school management" (20/10/23).

School Managers in school C said that they handle issues of students' safety and abuse by encouraging them to report to authorities on cases of abuse. The head of department for sciences in school C said that: *"We encourage students now and again to report any issues or safety concerns to their form teachers or the deputy head teacher"* (27/10/23). Despite the forum proving to be effective to a certain extent, some students could not have the courage to approach their teachers or members of the school management to register their concerns directly. This necessitates the need for School Managers to come up with proper strategies and forums where students are free to share their concerns with the school leaders (Maelan et al, 2018).

Data shows that school D was using the guidance and counselling committee to handle issues of child safety and abuse in the school and community. Where the issue is also affecting the community, a referral system was being used with the local hospital, social welfare, and the police under the Future Life Now program. The head teacher for school D claimed that a referral system helps the school management a lot in linking members of the community to address issues of child safety and abuse. *"Where issues of students' safety and abuse involve community members, we rely on a referral system, which has proved to be very helpful to us as a school"* (07/11/23).

The National Education Standard number 22: Care and welfare of students requires School Managers to ensure that students are learning in a safe environment and that their concerns are

dealt with appropriately. Data has revealed the need for School Managers to be regularly briefing students on issues concerning their safety at school and community. Recently, there have been cases of cholera outbreaks and covid19 pandemic, which demanded the need for School Managers to be constantly briefing the students on safety measures.

Data has also shown that the concerns about students' safety and abuse may be addressed by using the Grievance and Awareness Management Committee. This is a committee which comprises the deputy head teacher, heads of departments, and other staff members. Its mandate is to hear and address students' grievances at the school. Students are encouraged to approach any member of this committee whenever they have complaints regarding safety or welfare.

Some issues of students' safety and abuse may even involve members of the community. Where this is the case, School Managers need to involve community leaders in handling such issues. Data has revealed that where school authorities have a good working relationship with community leaders, it is easy to deal with the safety and welfare of students even when they are in their homes. Considering that a lot of secondary schools in Malawi are Community Day Secondary schools, it is important that schools really develop proper channels of engaging with members of the community. Apart from relying on the PTA in addressing this, data have revealed that schools can also use a referral system. This is where schools engage with the local hospital, social welfare, and the police under the Future Life Now program to address issues of students' welfare, safety, and abuse. Other studies, like that done by Nuwayo (2021), concluded that students' welfare greatly

influences students' academic performance. Nuwayo, therefore, encouraged school leaders to ensure that the welfare of students at the learning institution is given more attention.

4.2.6. *Management of buildings and facilities*

The National Education Standard 24 emphasises the need for schools to have adequate infrastructure, which can facilitate effective teaching and learning. Among the many necessary facilities required is the need for students and members of staff to have access to adequate and clean water. Differences were observed in terms of the availability of required infrastructure for effective teaching and learning. Data revealed that two of the four secondary schools studied did not have sufficient infrastructure. For instance, only schools A and D, which are conventional secondary schools, had enough washrooms for girls. This was not so with schools B and C, which had challenges in girls' accessibility to washrooms. On the challenge that girls face, the head teacher of school B stated that: *"We have plans to construct two more washrooms, but we have a limitation in terms of financial resources"* (20/10/23). The inadequate availability of washrooms negatively affects the learning of girls at the school. School Managers need to engage members of the community and other stakeholders in order to ensure that the learning of girls is facilitated.

Data showed that all the schools did not have problems in terms of students' and staff access to adequate and clean water. This was due to the support that many schools in the district are getting from donors and the government through the WASH project. As the head of department for humanities in school C revealed: *"Issues of students' and teachers' access to safe and clean water*

have been addressed with the coming in of the WASH project” (29/10/23). Such sentiments were equally shared by the School Managers in the rest of the schools.

In the management of buildings and facilities, schools also need to ensure the availability of adequate washrooms for girls. This has proved to be a big challenge with some of the schools. Data has revealed that two secondary schools did not have washrooms. This negatively affects the learning of the girl child and, hence, the quality of education. Spillane’s (2002) cognitive theory says that local factors like the availability of resources are influential in the implementation process of an education policy. This is in line with the findings of Okonkwo et al (2018), who established that the lack of essential facilities at the school tends to negatively affect the implementation of education goals and hence affect the quality of teaching and learning.

4.3. Challenges that School Managers are facing in the implementation of the National Education Standards for Secondary School Improvement.

Data has revealed that most schools were meeting several challenges in the course of implementing the NES. Five main challenges identified are a lack of understanding of the policy, ineffective orientation, infrequent supervision, inadequate support and resources, and a negative attitude by the stakeholders. These challenges have been presented below:

4.3.1. Lack of understanding of the National Education Standards for school improvement

Educational standards are defined as the minimum requirements that all schools in the country are mandated to achieve (NES, 2015, p 6). They specify the expected outcomes for students, which

should be delivered by all education providers in both public and private institutions. The standards also identify the leadership, management, and teaching processes that are necessary for the achievement of national education outcomes. The overall purpose of the National Education Standards is to improve several areas of school operations, like students' performance, teachers' performance, as well as school infrastructure.

Data revealed a general lack of understanding of the National Education Standards for school improvement amongst the heads of departments. Although all the head teachers were able to explain the meaning and aims of the National Education Standards, eight of the twelve heads of departments interviewed failed to accurately state the meaning and aims. Most of them also indicated that they had not read the booklet for the standards. For instance, the head of department for sciences from school B defined the National Education Standards as “*rules and regulations for running the school*” (20/10/23). Having been asked about the aims of the National Education Standards, the head of department for languages from school A said, “*They are aimed at guiding good behaviour for teachers and students at the school*” (15/10/23). On a similar note, all the heads of departments and two head teachers could not name any specific standard that deals with school improvement. Only two head teachers could recall that National Education Standard 16 deals with school improvement.

The study was framed by a cognitive perspective on policy implementation (Spillane et al, 2002). The theory emphasises the need for stakeholders like School Managers to fully understand a policy before they can start implementing it. The ideas that implementers construct from the way they

understand the policy are critical to their enactment of that policy. Implementation involves interpretation that the implementers figure out of what a policy means in order to decide whether and what to ignore, adapt, or adopt the policy makers' recommendations in their practice. Rayou and van Zanten (2015) give an enlightening definition of an education policy: education policies are programmes developed by public authorities, informed by values and ideas, directed to education actors, and implemented by administrators and education professionals.

National Educational Standards, like all other policies affecting schools, need to be well understood by the School Managers if they are to be effectively implemented. This entails that effective implementation of the national education standards very much depends on the secondary School Managers' understanding. School change scholars suggest that unless teachers, school leaders, and other actors in education understand and share the policy meaning, it is unlikely to be implemented (Fullan, 2015). This is in agreement with the study by Brynard (2002), who argued that the implementation of a policy, like the case of the NES, can fail, sometimes not because of the unwillingness of the implementers, but perhaps because their ability to implement is hampered by their failure to understand what the policy means.

Despite failure to give the meaning and example of one National Education Standard for school improvement, all the head teachers from the four schools were able to state their roles in the implementation of the standards at the school level. For instance, the head teacher for school D stated that her role was: *“supervising officers under my charge as well as coordinating programmes with stakeholders like PTA and chiefs to ensure adherence to the standards”*

(07/11/23). This was also supported by the head teachers of the other three schools. For instance, the head teacher for school B stated one of his roles as: *“I play leadership in encouraging students, teachers, parents, and the community to take their part in the activities that concern them at the school”* (20/10/23).

Data revealed disparities amongst the heads of departments in stating their specific roles in the implementation of the National Education Standards. Only five of the twelve heads of departments interviewed could state their leadership and management roles in the implementation process. Head of department for languages in school B stated her role as: *“Making sure that teachers can understand the education standards and also supervising them”* (22/10/23). This was also supported by the head of department for sciences in school D, who said: *“As a member of school management, I act as a supervisor of the teachers during the implementation process”* (10/11/23). However, seven heads of department could not specifically state their leadership and managerial roles during the implementation process of the standards. The head of department for humanities in school A responded like this: *“My role is to teach learners based on the contents of the curriculum”* (15/10/23). This was similar to what the head of department for sciences in school C said: *“I make sure that learners are following school rules and regulations.”* (27/10/23).

Effective implementation of National Education Standards depends on the role that school leaders are to play to ensure effective enactment of the policy. The cognitive theory for policy implementation stipulates that one of the responsibilities of the School Managers is to enlighten other role players in education at the school about what the standards mean to them and the school

if they are to effectively participate in the implementation process. To play such a role, it is imperative that the School Managers should first understand the standards themselves before bringing other stakeholders or role players on board (Fullan, 2015). After having a thorough understanding, they can easily orient other stakeholders on what the education standards mean and what needs to be done to implement the standards effectively.

Data has revealed that many of the heads of departments interviewed could not state their specific roles in the implementation of the National Education Standards. All this simply calls for proper strategies to be applied by the School Managers for them to understand the meaning, aims, and mode of implementing the National Education Standards for school improvement. The advancement in technology the world has experienced has ensured that books and other essential documents can be accessed online. School Managers need to take the initiative to ensure the availability and understanding of the standards by all stakeholders at the school level.

4.3.2. Ineffective orientation to the National Education Standards for school improvement

The Ministry of Education, through the education divisions, oriented the secondary School Managers on the implementation of the NES following their introduction. This study, therefore, set out to investigate the way secondary School Managers were oriented and the quality of the orientation for effective implementation. Data has revealed that School Managers from the schools involved in this study were ineffectively oriented. This was revealed in the way the participants responded when they were asked about the quality of the National Education Standards orientation. The School Managers who participated in this study responded that the orientation had a lot of

weaknesses. The weaknesses included a short period of time for the orientation, as well as the involvement of a few participants per school. It was revealed from the data that the orientation was done only for one day. This meant that a lot of things were learnt, making it difficult for the participants to understand. On the other hand, only head teachers were oriented on the implementation of the National Education Standards. The expectation was that these head teachers would thereafter orient heads of departments, teachers, and other stakeholders in their respective schools. This proved ineffective as some head teachers failed to effectively orient their members of staff.

Commenting on the shortfalls of the orientation, the Head teacher at secondary school A said that: *“the orientation was just for a day, which to me was not enough, as the work to be learnt was just too much. It was hard for most of us to understand most of the things taught”* (12/10/23). Data shows that three out of the four head teachers complained that the orientation time was not enough, as the contents of the National Education Standards booklet were so extensive for a person to understand within a day. The facilitators were trying to cover a lot of work within the time frame they were given, and some failed to cover the required content; as such, most of the participants failed to grasp all the required information. The head teacher at secondary school D complained that, *“There was no hands-on approach on orientation about application of the standards, but rather more theoretical and trainer-centered”* (07/11/23).

In addition to that, the NES orientation involved head teachers only. This was done even though the implementation of the policy needs the support of all members of staff at a school level, as

well as parents and members of the community. The head teacher at school B lamented that: *“It would have been good if heads of departments and some teachers were also oriented as they are the main implementers of the standards, while as head teachers we only act as supervisors”* (20/10/23). This was also supported by a head of department for languages in school C: *“I was only given the booklet for the National Education Standards to read, since I could not follow many of its contents, I did not bother to finish reading it”* (29/10/23).

Data revealed that only two schools out of the four conducted school-based trainings to orient teachers and heads of departments on the implementation of the National Education Standards. The head of department for humanities in secondary school D said that, *“our head teacher by then oriented us at school level after attending the divisional training, but after he was transferred, there has not been anything done about the emphasis on implementation of National Education Standards”* (10/11/23).

The findings of the study also revealed that some School Managers, especially heads of departments, were not oriented to the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. These are the managers who were promoted two or more years after the introduction of the National Education Standards by the Ministry of Education. Data has revealed that out of twelve heads of departments who participated in the study, seven of them were not oriented. For instance, the head of department for Languages at school A complained that: *“I have never been oriented to the implementation of National Education Standards and I have not come across the booklet for the standards”* (15/10/23). Similarly, the head of department for sciences at

school C said that, “*I was not oriented to the curriculum. I only heard about the standards when I was in college*” (27/10/23). Figure 4.3 summarizes the Ineffectiveness of School Managers and teachers’ orientation.

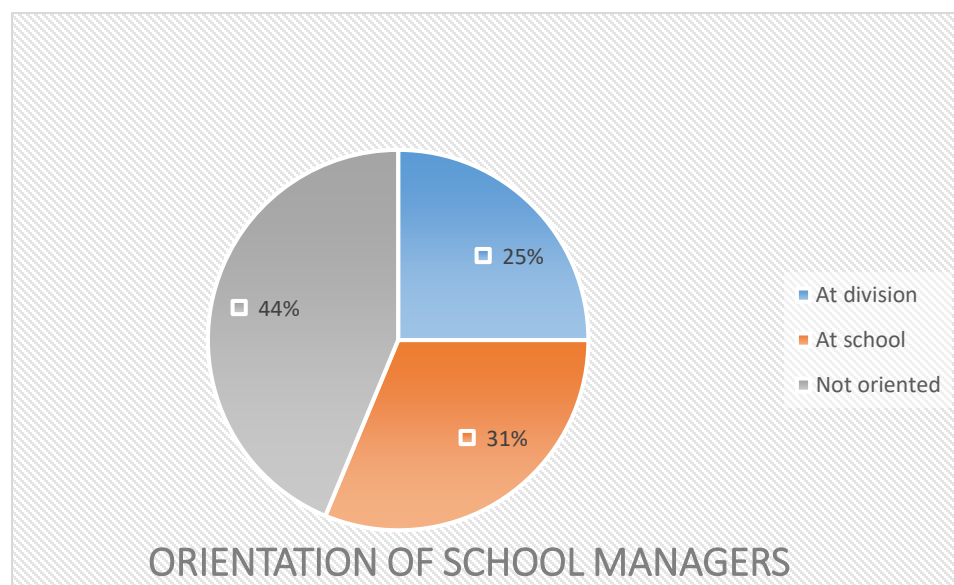


Figure 4.3: Ineffectiveness of School Managers and teachers’ orientation

The study has found that the orientation of School Managers to the national education standards for school improvement was not effectively done because of the short period of time of the orientation, as well as the use of a cascade model of training. Data revealed that the orientation was done only for one day. This meant that a lot of things were learnt, making it difficult for the participants to fully understand, hence their failure to appropriately train their members of staff at school. The cognitive theory on which the study has been framed says that implementation of a policy involves interpretation that the implementers figure out of what a policy means in order to decide whether and what to ignore, adapt, or adopt policy makers' recommendations in their

practice (Spillane et al, 2002). As key role players in the implementation of the national education standards, it was imperative that the School Managers should initially be effectively oriented.

On the other hand, only head teachers were oriented on the implementation of the National Education Standards. This is a cascade model where a few members of an institution are trained with the expectation that they will subsequently train their colleagues or subordinates in their duty stations. This made the other members of staff, like heads of departments and teachers, to be ineffectively oriented because only the head teachers were oriented by the division officers, and the rest of them were oriented by head teachers who were ineffectively oriented. This resulted in ineffective implementation of the national education standards for school improvement. In fact, the cascade model's effectiveness depends on the competence and skills of the person to train others at the final stage. As Rembe (2006) said, orientation of this kind results in poor transmission of information, as most of the information previously acquired may end up being diluted in the process of further training. Despite the cascade model being considered cost-effective, data have shown that it has problems in terms of failure to transmit the intended information (Thornton, 2005). The Ministry of Education needs to make efforts to ensure that School Managers and teachers are effectively oriented to the implementation of the National Education Standards.

The study has indicated that ineffective orientation of School Managers has negatively affected the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement. Poor orientation of the head teachers made them fail to effectively train their subordinates at the school level. This is in line with the results of the study done by Kortide and Yunos (2015), who found that a lack of

adequate training for supervisors and teachers negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning.

4.3.3. Infrequent and ineffective supervision of the implementation process.

The Ministry of Education in Malawi formulated the National Education Standards to improve several areas of school operations, like students' performance, teachers' performance as well and school infrastructure. Effective implementation of the standards very much depends on the appropriate management strategies that the school leadership is putting in place. Of more significance amongst all the 26 education standards formulated are the 12 standards which concentrate on the role of school management and leadership in improving the affairs of the school, which is the focus of the study.

Among several roles of management and leadership that the National Education Standards stipulate, they also emphasise that school leadership should identify areas of focus for supervision and the provision of advisory support. This is in agreement with Spillane's (2002) cognitive perspective, which mentions limited supervision as one of the factors impinging on effective implementation of a policy. According to the national education standards, two types of stakeholders are entrusted with the responsibility of supervising the implementation. These are the School Managers and Quality Assurance Officers (QAO) from the division. School Managers need to be monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating the performance of members of staff. At the school level, supervision of the implementation of the NES may be done by the head teacher, deputy head

teacher, and the heads of departments. Quality Assurance Officers do supervise schools at the division level. To be effective, this supervision has to be done regularly.

At the school level, data revealed that supervision of the implementation of the National Education Standards happens rarely. Three of the four head teachers interviewed confessed to not conducting supervision of their members of staff on a regular basis. They attributed this to the greater workload they had and also the failure to understand the assessment procedures of the implementation process. The head teacher for school B said that: *“I rarely do supervision of the implementation of the standards just because of the workload that I have”* (20/10/23). However, the head teacher for school C said that he supervises the implementation of the standards, although he does not follow the recommended procedures for supervision: *“I follow my own way of supervising the implementation of the standards as the recommended procedures from the booklet are complex to follow”* (27/10/23).

Data also revealed that nine of the twelve heads of departments interviewed do not know the procedures to be followed in the supervision of the implementation of the National Education standards, as they were not oriented on how to do this. The head of department for Humanities in school D confessed not to have done supervision of the implementation of the standards in the five years he has been in that position: *“I do not remember having supervised the implementation of the standards as I was not oriented on how the supervision should be done”* (10/11/23). This was also echoed by the head of department for sciences from school B: *“I have never read the procedures for supervision, and this is the reason I have never done so”* (20/10/23).

Another kind of supervision that the NES implementation requires is the one done by the Quality Assurance Officers from the division office. Data revealed that this kind of supervision is also rarely done. Many of the School Managers interviewed could not recall the last time the officials from the division supervised their schools, specifically to supervise them on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. For instance, the head of department for humanities in school B said: *“In the five years I have been in this position, I have never been supervised by outside supervisors”* (22/10/23). This was also supported by the head of department for languages in school C: *“It is now about six if not seven years without being supervised by officials from the Ministry”* (29/10/23). Interview with the Quality Assurance officers (QAO) also evidenced this. Both officers claimed that they do not supervise schools specifically on the implementation of the standards, but in many areas. QAO 2 emphasised this: *“when supervising schools, we look for several issues and not only on NES implementation”* (14/11/23). They also revealed that the supervision process is not done regularly due to constraints on resources. QAO 1 agreed to this by saying that: *“Supervision is a process that requires resources and due to constrained resources we normally have, we do not conduct supervision exercises regularly”* (14/11/23). This is in agreement with the study by Kumbuga & Dadi (2015), who said that inadequate funding negatively affects the supervision of schools.

Data has revealed that all secondary schools involved in this study are experiencing ineffective and infrequent supervision of the implementation process of the National Education Standards for school improvement. The standards mention two stakeholders entrusted with the responsibility of supervising the implementation. These are the School Managers and Quality Assurance Officers

from the division. At the school level, data revealed that supervision of the implementation of the National Education Standards happens rarely. Despite workload being a factor leading to irregular supervision of the subordinates, management needs to understand that supervision done on a regular basis is a prerequisite to effective implementation of policies like the national education standards.

As the national education standards emphasise, Quality Assurance Officers from the division office, as well as officials from DIAS, are mandated to carry out inspection exercises of the schools. One of the important areas of their focus is the supervision of the implementation of the standards by the schools. However, it has turned out from the data that such supervision is also rarely done. Although the quality assurance officers are mandated to supervise schools for a minimum of two times in a year, two to four years can pass with some schools not being supervised. Despite the limitation of resources being cited as one of the causes for the irregular supervision, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to ensure that resources are allocated towards this important exercise. In their study, Sudarni et al. (2021) established that supervision improves teacher performance.

4.3.4 Inadequate support and resources for the implementation of National Education Standards for school improvement.

Education administrators and advisory services in divisions and districts are mandated by the Ministry of Education to explain, interpret, and exemplify the National Education Standards to education practitioners and civil society within their individual contexts, across all sectors, and at

all levels in the education system. All schools are therefore required to implement these requirements to promote equality of educational opportunity and remove barriers to achievement. In this way, the overall quality of education will improve, and the knowledge and skills of the general population will increase across the country. This means that the effective implementation of the standards depends much on the support that the implementers receive from their superiors. With its general constructivist perspective, cognitive theory suggests that the construction of meaning from a particular policy very much depends on the support that the implementers receive from their principals (Spillane et al, 2002). The kind of support required may vary, but the data has identified training and provision of resources as the most required support.

Most of the School Managers interviewed bemoaned the absence of training on the implementation of the National Education Standards. All the head teachers from the four schools indicated that they only attended one training at the divisional level. This was only when the standards were first being introduced. Similarly, all the head teachers interviewed pointed lack of training on the implementation of the national education standards as one of the drawbacks affecting the successful implementation of the policy. For instance, the head teacher for school C said: *“Lack of training on implementation of the NES is causing our schools to struggle in its implementation. This is because many deputy heads and heads of department never attended the first divisional training”* (27/10/23).

Absence of insets at the school level also emerged from the data as one of the drawbacks to the implementation of the NES for school improvement. Ten of the twelve heads of department

indicated that they have never attended any training about the implementation of the National Education Standards. All the head teachers pointed to the limitation of resources and lack of support as the main reasons school-based insets are not conducted regularly. In agreement with this, the head teacher for school A hinted that: *“Even if plans may be there to conduct insets specifically on the implementation of the standards, there are limitations on resources for such an exercise”* (12/10/23). The Head teacher for school D further said that: *“It would be better if schools received support in terms of experts and resources for conducting such trainings”* (07/11/23).

Data has revealed that secondary schools were facing problems in the implementation of the NES because of inadequate support and resources. For School Managers to effectively implement the NES, they need first to be trained and guided by the officials from the Ministry of Education. Unfortunately, this is not regularly done. Apart from the training, schools also need to have adequate resources for the effective implementation of the NES for school improvement. Since there were limited resources, the implementation of the NES had been negatively affected. This is also in agreement with the cognitive theory on policy implementation, which points to limited resources as one of the factors that increase implementers’ variations in the implementation of policies (Lipsky, 1980). In his study on factors affecting educational policy implementation effectiveness in three provinces of Thailand, Champucot (2011) revealed that one of the factors affecting the implementation of educational policies was limited resources. A growing body of research is also in agreement with these findings (Chirwa et al, 2023, and Maluleke, 2015)

4.3.5. Negative attitude by some stakeholders on the implementation of the standards.

The successful implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement, like any other policy, depends on a positive attitude of the implementers. Data has revealed that one of the challenges facing the implementation of the standards was the negative attitude that most heads of departments had towards the standards. Out of the twelve HODs interviewed, nine did not show real interest in the knowledge of the standards. For instance, many of the HODs did not bother to take an initiative in trying to understand what the national education standards mean to them as School Managers, as well as to the entire school. Some of them confessed to having come across the booklet of the national education standards, but could not bother to read it. Other heads of departments acknowledged having learnt about the standards either in college or being told by the head teachers, even though they could not take them seriously. It was pointed out by the head of department for humanities in school B: *“I remember having heard about the standards in college, but I haven’t had an interest in them after starting teaching”* (22/10/23).

Despite head teachers taking an initiative in explaining what the standards are and the need for adherence to them, some heads of departments still could not develop a positive attitude towards them. This was revealed by the head of sciences in school C: *“Our head teacher tends to talk about the need to adhere to the requirements of the national education standards, but I think it’s a lack of interest that makes many of us not use them”* (27/10/23).

At the school level, heads of departments play a greater role as they are the direct supervisors of the teaching staff in their departments. This means that their willingness to adopt and implement

the National Education Standards is crucial. As pointed out by Okonkwo et al (2018), local factors, including the agendas of the implementing agency and agents, community attitudes, resources, and time, are especially influential in the implementation process. The cognitive perspective on policy implementation further emphasises that policies that fit local agendas are embraced, whereas those that do not are opposed or modified (Spillane, 2002). The study by Maluleke (2015) on Curriculum Policy Implementation in the South African Education Context established that one of the challenges to curriculum policy implementation was the implementers' apathy towards the policy. All that this simply means is that the negative attitude of the implementers tends to negatively affect the implementation of education policies like the NES.

Having presented the status of the national education standards' implementation and the challenges they have been facing, data has also revealed the possible strategies for improving the implementation. The final part of this discussion will dwell on some of the notable strategies.

4.4. Possible strategies for improving the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

The data has revealed that School Managers faced several challenges in the course of implementing the National Education Standards for school improvement. Having acknowledged the presence of the challenges, most of the School Managers proposed several strategies that may be used to overcome the said challenges as well as to effectively implement the standards. The notable strategies as discussed below are: need for re-orientation, availability of resources and managerial

support, involvement of all stakeholders, and intensifying supervision of the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

4.4.1. Re-orientation of School Managers and regular CPDs on the implementation of the National Education Standards.

One of the main challenges that the implementation of the National Education Standards was facing was the ineffective orientation of the School Managers. Spillane's (2002) cognitive theory on policy implementation says that the ideas implementers construct from the way they understand a policy are critical to their enactment of that policy. This calls for deliberate efforts to be put in place for the policy implementers to understand the policy before rolling it out. All key role players in the implementation of the National Education Standard policy were supposed to be thoroughly oriented when the policy was being introduced. As it turned out, the orientation that followed the introduction of the standards by the Ministry of Education in 2015 only involved head teachers of the schools. The Ministry expected that the head teachers would thereafter train members of staff in their respective schools. However, data have revealed that subsequent orientation in the schools was either done partially or not done at all. On the same note, orientation of the head teachers was done only in one day, something that three of the four head teachers interviewed said was a weakness. The head teachers also said that the orientation was done in haste.

Data has shown that most of the participants in the study would have liked the Ministry of Education to conduct another orientation exercise on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. Three head teachers emphasised the need to include deputy

head teachers and heads of departments in the orientation exercise. The head teacher for school A had this to say: *“The division is supposed to conduct another orientation about the NES. This should involve not only head teachers but also deputies and heads of department, as they all form part of school management”* (12/10/23). Additionally, the study established that most of the head teachers who were oriented in the first exercise in 2015 had retired, hence a need for the Ministry of Education to conduct another orientation about the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. The head teacher for school C said: *“This exercise cannot be successful because most head teachers running schools now did not participate in the orientation by the division. Most of those oriented in the first exercise, am sure, are no longer in the system.”* (27/10/23).

Many heads of departments proposed the need for schools to be organising in-service trainings on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement, either at the cluster or school level. As it turned out from the data, seven of the twelve heads of departments had never attended any training regarding the implementation of the standards. The head of department for humanities in school C emphasised the need for schools to be organising training: *“I have been in this position for five years, but I can’t recall having attended any training about National Education Standards. So schools must be conducting insets now and again”* (29/10/23). The head of department for languages in school D shared similar sentiments: *“Since orientation by the division can’t involve everyone, it would be better to be conducting insets which should involve all of us either at cluster or school level”* (10/11/23).

Implementation of every policy, like the National Education Standards, requires adequate orientation of the policy to the potential implementers. As it turned out from the data, School Managers were ineffectively oriented to the implementation of the national education standards for school improvement. The orientation that followed the introduction of the standards by the Ministry of Education in 2015 did not involve all the School Managers at the school level, but only head teachers. This proved to be a shortfall on the side of the Ministry of Education, as many of the heads of departments interviewed showed a lack of understanding of the standards. The call for a re-orientation exercise is necessitated by the fact that the initial orientation was only done in 2015 with no other follow up orientation.

The need for the Ministry of Education to conduct another orientation is being supported by growing research. After identifying problems with the implementation of the Initial Primary Teacher Education Policy in Malawi, Chirwa et al (2023) recommended that key stakeholders should consider re-training of the teacher educators. This is also known as re-orientation. Similar sentiments were shared by the study by Spillane (2005). Having identified challenges with the implementation of new education standards for teaching Mathematics and Science in various districts of Michigan State, the study also recommended retraining of school leaders on standards implementation.

The study also revealed that schools have their role to play as far as orienting all members of staff and other stakeholders is concerned. Every school is mandated by the Ministry of Education to conduct Continuous Professional Development (CPDs) for its members of staff. One of the areas

School Managers can consider training their members of staff is orienting them on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. This could be organised either at the cluster or divisional level.

Data has shown that most of the participants in the study would like the Ministry of Education to conduct a re-orientation exercise on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. The next orientation should include all members of the management team for each school. The planning of the re-orientation exercise should consider increasing the number of days. Schools are also advised to take their part in orienting their members of staff as well as conducting continuous professional development (CPD) at the school level.

4.4.2. Allocation of adequate resources and provision of managerial support

Data has revealed that the successful implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement depends on the availability of resources. This starts from the beginning of introducing the standards at the school level. Head teachers were expected to orient their members of staff and other stakeholders on the implementation of the standards after themselves being oriented at the division level. However, three of the four head teachers interviewed cited the limitation of resources as a reason why they failed to subsequently orient their members of staff. Data has also shown that after the divisional orientation, there had not been any year in which all four schools had conducted in-service trainings on the implementation of the National Education Standards.

Most of the participants bemoaned the failure by the Ministry of Education to provide more resources to the schools. The head teacher for school B proposed the need for the government to provide more resources to schools so that they should be able to conduct in-service training. *“I would be happy if the government increased funding to schools, so that conducting insets should not be a problem”* (20/10/23). This was also echoed by the head of department for Sciences from school C: *“As schools, we’re failing to conduct insets because we do not have enough resources. It is important that authorities should support schools by increasing funding”* (27/10/23).

Resources are not only required for the conducting of insets but also for the actual implementation of the National Education Standards. Data has revealed that one major reason schools struggled to effectively implement some standards is the inadequacy of resources. As revealed in the data, schools B and C have struggled to have enough infrastructure, like washrooms for girls, due to inadequate financial resources. The head teacher for school C revealed this when asked as to why the school did not have enough infrastructure: *“We have the plans to construct the girls’ hostels, but due to limited financial resources, we’re failing to implement our plans. If stakeholders can support us with some funds, we will definitely do this”* (27/10/23).

Data has revealed that inadequate resources that come as a result of poor funding (Vespoor, 2008) negatively affected the implementation of the National Education Standards in the selected secondary schools. Lipsky (1980) pointed out that limited resources tend to increase implementers variations in the implementation of policies. The cognitive perspective on policy implementation also agrees with such sentiments by mentioning limited resources as one of the constraints to policy

implementation (Spillane, 2002). This calls for all stakeholders to make commitments to ensure that more resources are allocated towards the implementation of the National Education Standards. Since effective implementation of the standards aids school improvement, School Managers and other stakeholders should regard implementation of the standards as a priority area by allocating adequate resources to the exercise. Resources allocation is an important activity by managers that promotes for execution of plans and strategies (Nyadere, 2014). Shortage of resources could affect the way policies like the NES are implemented.

Effective implementation of the standards depends much on the support that the implementers also receive from their superiors. The kind of support required may vary depending on the needs of the individual schools as well as the implementers themselves. Education administrators and advisory services in divisions and districts are mandated by the Ministry of Education to explain, interpret, and exemplify the National Education Standards to education practitioners and civil society within their individual contexts, across all sectors and at all levels in the system. All schools are therefore required to implement these requirements in order to promote quality of educational opportunity and remove barriers to achievement. This is also in line with Spillane's model of cognitive perspective on policy implementation (Spillane et al, 2002). The theory emphasises the key role School Managers are to play in ensuring effective implementation of the standards. As Spillane points out, the ideas that implementers construct from the way they understand the policy are critical to their enactment of that policy. Implementation involves interpretation that the implementers figure out of what a policy means in order to decide whether and what to ignore, adapt, or adopt policy makers' recommendations in their practice. So it is the responsibility of

School Managers to play a supportive leadership role in helping all stakeholders at school level in understanding the national education standards.

At school level, the data has revealed the need for a supportive leadership style to be used by the School Managers if the National Education Standards are to be effectively implemented. The school leaders need to support their subordinates at school level during the implementation of the NES. The kind of support required maybe through allocation of adequate resources as well as organising in service trainings for the stakeholders. For schools to conduct these insets on a regular basis there is a need for the school management to provide support in allocating required resources, as well as showing their willingness. Bossert, Heck, and Hallinger (2002) cited one of the responsibilities of educational leadership as developing people by providing teachers and other members of staff with the needed support and training. Leadership actions needed to make such transformations include offering intellectual stimulation, giving individualised support, and supplying models of best practices and beliefs. Leadership at school level is about redesigning the school organisation by making it work to ensure that a wide range of conditions and incentives support teaching and learning. Management and leadership should act to advance organisational change, including strengthening school cultures and building collaborative processes. According to Nandasinghe (2020), leadership is the process of encouraging and helping others to work enthusiastically towards the achievement of objectives. It involves developing a vision for the organization that will encourage employees to work with passion. The school management should emphasize teamwork and collaboration, which are essential components in the provision of quality education. This is in line with the findings of the study by Waters (2021), who concluded that good leadership should embrace the principles of management which bring about continuous

improvement, and which guide the students, teachers, and Board of Management (BoM) in working toward the achievement of the organizational objectives.

4.4.3. *Involvement of all stakeholders*

National Education Standard 19 requires the school authorities to be in good partnership with parents and the community (NES, 2015). As it turns out from the research, there were far greater differences in terms of magnitude in schools engaged external stakeholders like parents and the community in the implementation of the National Education Standards.

It was quite evident from the research that two of the four schools showed evidence of having a good relationship with parents and the community. The parents through the PTA had helped these schools in the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement especially in the improvement of school infrastructure and students' performance. For instance, through collaboration with the PTA, school A is constructing a perimeter fence around the school premises. The head teacher for the school commended the relationship the school has with stakeholders like PTA: *“With the initiative of the PTA we are able to construct a brick fence around the school, this is expected to improve the security of the students and members of staff”* (12/10/23).

Data has revealed that in school D the PTA had helped to improve the performance of students in national examinations for the previous two years. They have achieved this through the provision of awards to teachers whose students had performed very well. The head of department for sciences in school D commended the role parents and the community play in the improvement of students'

performance through the motivation of teachers: *“The giving of awards by the PTA and alumni has encouraged us as teachers to work hard, thereby improving students’ performance”* (07/10/23).

Having been asked what the school had done to bring parents on board in the motivation of teachers, the head teacher for school D explained that they had to share the vision of the school with the parents during a PTA meeting. *“We informed the parents of our intentions in getting a single digit and at least a 95% pass rate at MSCE, and we further expressed our expectations to the parents. If all schools can adopt this am sure they can also improve”* (07/11/23).

As it turned out from the study, schools that were engaging the stakeholders in the implementation of the standards had been performing well in their activities. This was evidenced by what the QAO 1 said: *“Schools whose level of community involvement increased have witnessed improved performance and improved infrastructure”* (11/12/23).

Knowledge of the school’s vision and expectations prompted the parents to discuss what roles they were to play to ensure that there was improved performance of students. One of such roles was the introduction of teachers’ awards for the national examination results. Standard 19 requires School Managers to share the school’s vision with parents and other stakeholders. The head of department for humanities in school A said that they make parents aware of the school’s expectations and aspirations so that they should take part in the attainment of such goals. *“We normally emphasise to parents that they have a role to play in the achievement of the vision of the school”* (15/10/23).

Data has shown that schools that rarely engage parents in the achievement of their goals also struggle in the implementation of their vision. This was evident with schools B and C, whose managers could not specifically state the extent to which they engaged parents and the community. For instance, in school B, the school still lacks adequate infrastructure like girls' washrooms, science laboratories, and an administration office. This is also similar to school C, which is even struggling to continue with the construction of a perimeter fence whose construction work had stopped for about five years due to wrangles with the surrounding community members.

Due to failure to engage stakeholders like parents and the community, even the performance of schools B and C in national examinations had not improved for several years. As a solution to this, the head teacher for school D raised an important point which other School Managers can emulate. *“As leaders in the schools, we need to find better means of engaging the parents and other members of the community so that they help in the improvement of our schools” (07/11/23).*

Data has revealed the need for School Managers to involve all stakeholders in the implementation of the NES. Through collaboration with parents and members of the community through the PTA and other relevant organisations, schools can improve in performance as well as development activities. The research has established that School Managers have a role to play in bringing the schools' stakeholders on board for the successful implementation of the National Education Standards.

There are 26 National Education Standards that cover several areas of school activities. Apart from affecting the students, School Managers and teachers, some of the standards also affect parents and other members of the community. This calls for concerted efforts of all stakeholders in order to ensure effective implementation of the standards. In fact, standard 19 requires the school authorities to be in good partnership with all stakeholders. A stakeholder in an organization is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Kivits and Sawang, 2021). Therefore, stakeholders include both teaching and non-teaching staff such as educators, learners, administrative clerks, general workers, and parents. They may also include the government, NGOs, and all the community members who have an interest in the education of their children. Stakeholders' interests are, not always consistent, and the various stakeholders are not always affected in the same way by every strategic decision. Their influence will therefore vary from one decision to another. This will determine which stakeholders will be given priority in any decision or plan of the school. Stefan et al (2023) point out that the school principals cannot fulfill the whole leadership role alone.

Stakeholder involvement means School Managers working with people and using the resources as they are, and helping them to work together to realize agreed-upon ends and goals. As it turns out from the research, some schools were not fully engaging the parents and other members of the community. Studies indicate that parental and community participation and involvement in education have a positive influence on a child's academic outcomes (Sakaue et al, 2023; Reinke, 2013). It was quite evident from the research that two of the four schools showed evidence of having a good relationship with parents and the community. The parents, through the PTA, have

been helping the schools in the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement, especially in the improvement of school infrastructure and students' performance.

Data has revealed that some schools were able to improve the performance of students in national examinations just because of having a good working relationship with parents. The parents, through the PTA, have been participating in rewarding hard-working teachers as well as improving the school infrastructure. This is in line with the study by Yaro et al. (2017), who were examining the relevance of stakeholders in education policy implementation. They established that education stakeholders have a significant role to play in policy implementation. The study by Charles and Sunday (2015) also indicated that stakeholders' participation in education-related issues has a great impact on educational policy implementation towards attaining quality education.

School Managers are mandated by Standard 19 to share the school's vision with parents and other stakeholders. Parents and members of the community will participate in the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement if they are aware of the school's expectations and aspirations. It is therefore essential to identify the key players in the implementation of government policies like the National Education Standards. School Managers ought to understand how these key players are impacted by the school activities and their level of influence to enable the school to achieve its goals and vision (Amos et. al, 2008).

4.4.4. Empowerment and motivation of all stakeholders

The cognitive perspective theory by Spillane (2002) identifies local school beliefs, agendas, and situations as important influences on the effective implementation of a policy such as the National Education Standards. This is in line with findings of the study, which revealed that negative attitudes by various stakeholders, like School Managers and other members of staff, hindered the implementation of the National Education Standards policy.

One of the responsibilities of School Managers is to motivate members of the school community so that they participate in helping the school to effectively implement the national education standards for school improvement. This is one of the strategies for overcoming the negative attitude of the stakeholders in the implementation of the standards. Leadership at the school level is about redesigning the school organisation by making it work to ensure that a wide range of conditions and incentives support teaching and learning. According to Nandasinghe (2020), leadership is the process of motivating others to work enthusiastically toward the implementation of educational policies. This is in line with the findings of the study by Waters (2021), who concluded that good leadership should embrace the principles of management, which support the achievement of the organizational objectives by providing adequate resources towards the achievement of educational goals. In their study on the implementation of Continuous Assessment, Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) observed that education authorities need to equip School Managers with adequate knowledge on the theories and practices of staff motivation so that they can encourage their subordinates to work harder, faster, more efficiently, and with greater enthusiasm. They further argued that education policies can be successfully implemented if School Managers become aware of basic human needs and motivation theories and processes. This means

knowledge and application of motivation theories should help School Managers in facilitating the implementation of the National Education Standards policy.

Related to motivation is the empowerment of the stakeholders in the implementation of education policies like the NES. Without empowerment, people feel disconnected, undervalued, and ultimately not engaged in their work (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997). Everard and Morris (1996) share similar sentiments in this regard when they assert that heads and senior staff in schools have a responsibility to help everyone concerned to discover and conceptualize the true nature of change and how it impinges on everyone in an organization.

Ensuring that implementers of the standards have a positive attitude is the responsibility of the school leadership. It is necessary to create an awareness amongst all the stakeholders at the school as far as the importance of implementing the standards is concerned. School Managers should play both the direct and indirect roles in order to induce stakeholders' positive attitude towards the national education standards for school improvement. They should be knowledgeable enough to use suitable and effective leadership and management styles. Ramalepe and Zengele (2014) argued that good leaders will always birth good schools. This is further supported by Kruger and Sternman (2003), who stated that effective education cannot be realised without leadership and management. School leaders have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset, and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools in challenging circumstances.

4.4.5. Intensifying supervision of the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

The National Education Standards require Quality Assurance Officers to use Standard 16: School self-evaluation and improvement to inform the support and monitoring they provide to schools at different stages of the school improvement cycle: following up inspections, identifying improvement targets, monitoring the school's progress in taking the necessary action, and evaluating whether the school has achieved what it set out to do. This means that supervision of the implementation of National Education Standards is an important factor for the effectiveness of the standards' implementation. The cognitive perspective theory considers regular supervision of the policy implementation by responsible authorities to ensure that deviations from the process of implementation are cleared. A study conducted by Wanzare (2013) on instructional supervision in public schools in Kenya reveals that the purpose of supervision is to improve educational policy implementation, which in turn improves student academic achievement and quality of education.

Supervision of the implementation of education standards may be done by outside stakeholders of the school or the School Managers themselves. Outside stakeholders of the school could be Quality Assurance Officers from the division or officials from the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Inspection. Quality Assurance Officers are responsible for ensuring that educational institutions comply with established educational standards and policies. They can also monitor and evaluate the implementation of educational policies and guidelines, ensuring that schools meet quality benchmarks and regulatory requirements.

Data has shown that outside stakeholders rarely supervise schools on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. For instance, the head teacher for school C said that the school had been supervised once on the implementation of the National Education Standards, “*regarding supervision on NES, we have only been supervised once by the division inspectors*” (27/10/23). Table 4.2 below shows the number of times schools have been supervised by outside stakeholders on the implementation of the National Education Standards.

Table 4.2: Number of times for supervision of schools.

School	Number of times supervised per academic year
A	3
B	2
C	1
D	4

The table shows that external stakeholders like Quality Assurance Officers from the Education Division and officials from the Directorate of Inspection and Assurance Services (DIAS) have supervised school D four times, school A three times, school B two times, and school C once. For school D, which has been supervised many times than any other school, data revealed that mostly the supervisors do not supervise the schools specifically to assess the implementation of the National Education Standards. This means that their assessment of how schools are performing in the implementation of the standards is not fully done. The head teacher for school D stated her

opinion on the requirement for supervision by external stakeholders: *“I wish the division officials would be supervising us now and again, they should be advising schools on the right way of implementing the standards”* (07/11/23). This was also echoed by the head of department for languages in school A, who said that: *“Supervision by the division officials would give more meaning towards the implementation of the standards”* (15/10/23).

On the importance of supervision by the external stakeholders the head teacher for school B said that the supervision of the implementation of the standards by external stakeholders would show that the Ministry of Education is serious about the need to implement the standards: *“Division officials need to supervise schools to show the seriousness of the need for schools to be implementing the National Education Standards”* (27/10/23).

Apart from relying on supervision by outside stakeholders, data has revealed that most School Managers admitted to the need for them to intensify supervision of the implementation of the NES in their schools. The head of department for sciences in school C admitted to this: *“Now I think as school management we have to be supervising other members of staff in the implementation of the standards for it to be a success”* (27/10/23). This was also agreed upon by the head teacher of school A: *“It’s true that as School Managers we should show leadership in the implementation of the national education standards. This can be through supervising the members of staff now and again.”* (12/10/23).

It is quite evident from the data that regular supervision is a catalyst for the effective implementation of government policies like the National Education Standards. In fact, Wardiah's (2020) study established that supervision helps the implementers as well as the supervisors themselves in gaining knowledge about day-to-day operations in order to effectively implement the school's objectives. Supervision by the School Managers at the school level and that done by division officials gives more meaning to the implementation of the National Education Standards.

Monitoring and evaluation have always been considered as tools for facilitating the implementation of plans of an organisation. These come out of the supervision of the implementation process by the people in authority. Like the organisation's plans, there is a need to intensify supervision of the implementation of the National Education Standards. This supervision may be done internally by the School Managers or by external stakeholders like the division's Quality Assurance Officers or by officials from the Directorate of Inspection and Assurance Services (DIAS).

It is quite evident from the data that supervision of the implementation of the national education standards has always been done on an irregular basis. Some schools take more than five years without being supervised by division or ministry officials. Despite lack of funding being the major cause of this, it is important for the division or ministry leadership to consider prioritising the allocation of resources towards the supervision of the implementation process. Supervision of the implementation of the standards by external stakeholders on a regular basis would show that the Ministry of Education is serious about the need to implement the standards (Sudarni, 2021). In her

study on Curriculum Policy Implementation in South Africa, Maluleke (2015) recommended that school principals should intensify monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation.

4.5. Chapter Summary

In summary, this section has presented the status of the implementation, challenges facing the implementation, and possible strategies for overcoming the challenges facing the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. The study has found that schools were having problems in implementing most of the standards. These standards were not being implemented as planned by the Ministry of Education due to a number of challenges that schools were facing. The main challenges were ineffective orientation, infrequent supervision, inadequate support and resources, and a negative attitude by the stakeholders towards the implementation of the National Education Standards. In order to overcome the challenges and improve the implementation of the NES, the School Managers involved in this study proposed a number of strategies. Some of the proposed strategies are re-orientation of School Managers, allocation of adequate resources, intensifying supervision, empowerment and motivation of stakeholders, and involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The study was aimed at investigating the School Managers' role in the implementation of National Education Standards for school improvement in the Salima district. In an attempt to achieve the research objectives outlined, the study established that the implementation of the NES was facing a number of challenges in the four secondary schools studied. Some of the main challenges facing the implementation of the NES for school improvement were ineffective orientation, infrequent and ineffective supervision, inadequate support and resources, and a negative attitude towards the national education standards. In order to mitigate the challenges being faced, the study established the following possible strategies: reorienting all stakeholders, allocating adequate resources towards the implementation of the standards, involvement of all stakeholders, and intensifying supervision of the standards' implementation. The study has concluded that failure to effectively conduct orientation of all stakeholders in the implementation of the national education standards is a major contributing factor to the challenges the policy is facing.

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

The study on the school managers' implementation of the national education standards for school improvements has established three main findings in relation to the specific objectives. Firstly, School Managers were not fully implementing all twelve leadership and management standards as planned by the framers of the standards.

The study has also established that several challenges were negatively affecting the implementation of the national education standards. The challenges identified were: ineffective orientation, infrequent and ineffective supervision, inadequate support and resources, and a negative attitude towards the national education standards.

The final major finding was the establishment of possible strategies that School Managers may use to overcome the challenges faced in the course of implementing the national education standards. The possible strategies were: re-orienting all stakeholders, allocation of adequate resources towards the implementation of the standards, involvement of all stakeholders, and intensifying supervision of the standards' implementation.

5.2 Conclusion

The study on the School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement has revealed that secondary School Managers are not fully implementing the National Education Standards as required by the Ministry of Education. Despite the study being done on a small scale, it has established the status of the implementation, whereby, due to the challenges being faced, schools are not fully implementing most of the standards as planned by the Ministry of Education. The findings of this study will help educational stakeholders who will come across this thesis and read it, such as the Ministry of Education, to add to the knowledge bank that they have on the School Managers' implementation of the NES for school improvement. The Ministry may use the findings in helping to help solve the challenges schools are facing so as

to improve the quality of education in Malawi. The results of the study will add theoretical knowledge on the capacity of schools and their leaders in implementing various policies formulated by the Ministry of Education. Such knowledge can provide a basis for other research on issues related to the implementation of government policies in the schools.

5.3 Contribution of the study to the education community.

The government of Malawi, through the Ministry of Education, developed the National Education Standards in 2015 to improve the performance of schools. Since the introduction of the standards, there has never been any significant study on the implementation of the standards. The study on School Managers' implementation of the NES for school improvement is of great significance to the education sector because the results of the study have the potential to provide a greater understanding of the role of School Managers in the implementation of the national education standards for secondary school improvement. They may further highlight the educational management strategies appropriate for the successful implementation of the education standards.

The goal of any government is to provide its citizens with high-quality education. The study has the potential to enlighten stakeholders of education on the suitable management techniques to be employed for the effective implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. The educational institutions can benefit from the study's information in terms of the need to take responsibility in improving students' achievements through the effective implementation of policies like the National Education Standards.

The study has the possibility of creating awareness on the challenges School Managers are facing as they implement the National Education Standards. This can inform relevant stakeholders of the possible intervention strategies in order to enhance the effective implementation of the standards.

Finally, the results of the study have the potential to add theoretical knowledge on challenges facing the implementation of the National Education Standards. Such knowledge can provide a basis for other research on issues related to the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

5.3 Recommendations.

The study has revealed various challenges facing the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement and the proposed strategies to overcome such challenges. Based on these findings, the study has made the following recommendations to School Managers and the Ministry of Education.

5.3.1 Recommendations to the School Managers.

- Being the main supervisors of the implementation of the National Education Standards at the school level, School Managers should come up with appropriate strategies for implementing the NES.
- School Managers should be involving more stakeholders in the implementation of the NES for school improvement.

5.3.2 Recommendations to the Ministry of Education

Being the initiator of the NES, the Ministry of Education has a key role to play in the successful implementation of the standards. Therefore, this study has proposed some recommendations to the Ministry of Education for the effective implementation of the national education standards for school improvement. Some of the recommendations are:

- The Ministry of Education should consider re-orienting the School Managers on the implementation of the National Education Standards. This should not only involve head teachers at the school level, but also other members of the school management, like deputy head teachers and heads of departments. This will enable more key role players at the school to have first-hand information for them to actively participate in the implementation of the national education standards.
- The Ministry of Education should be inspecting the implementation of the National Education Standards regularly to find out how schools are implementing the standards as planned. This will enable the Ministry to appreciate the challenges schools are facing in the implementation of the standards and find ways of intervening in such challenges.
- The Ministry of Education should allocate more resources to schools for the effective implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement.

5.3.3 Suggestions for further study.

The study involved four secondary schools in the Salima district. It has been established that almost all schools are not fully implementing all the management and leadership standards. All the schools are also facing a number of challenges in the implementation of the standards. Regarding this, the study has made the following suggestions for further study:

- A comprehensive study on the challenges facing the implementation of the National Education Standards should be conducted across the country.
- The study has found that some schools were not doing insets regarding the implementation of the standards. Therefore, this study suggests that a comprehensive study should be done to investigate the motivation of School Managers and members of staff in conducting insets on the implementation of the standards.
- The study only concentrated on the implementation of the National Education Standards for school improvement. Therefore, this study suggests that a comprehensive study across the country on the capacity of the secondary schools to implement other policies formulated by the Ministry of Education should be done.
- Out of the 26 National Education Standards formulated, the study focused on 12 standards, which are for leadership and management. Therefore, the study proposes that other studies should be done on the capacity of secondary schools in implementing the other national education standards. The other standards are for students and teachers.

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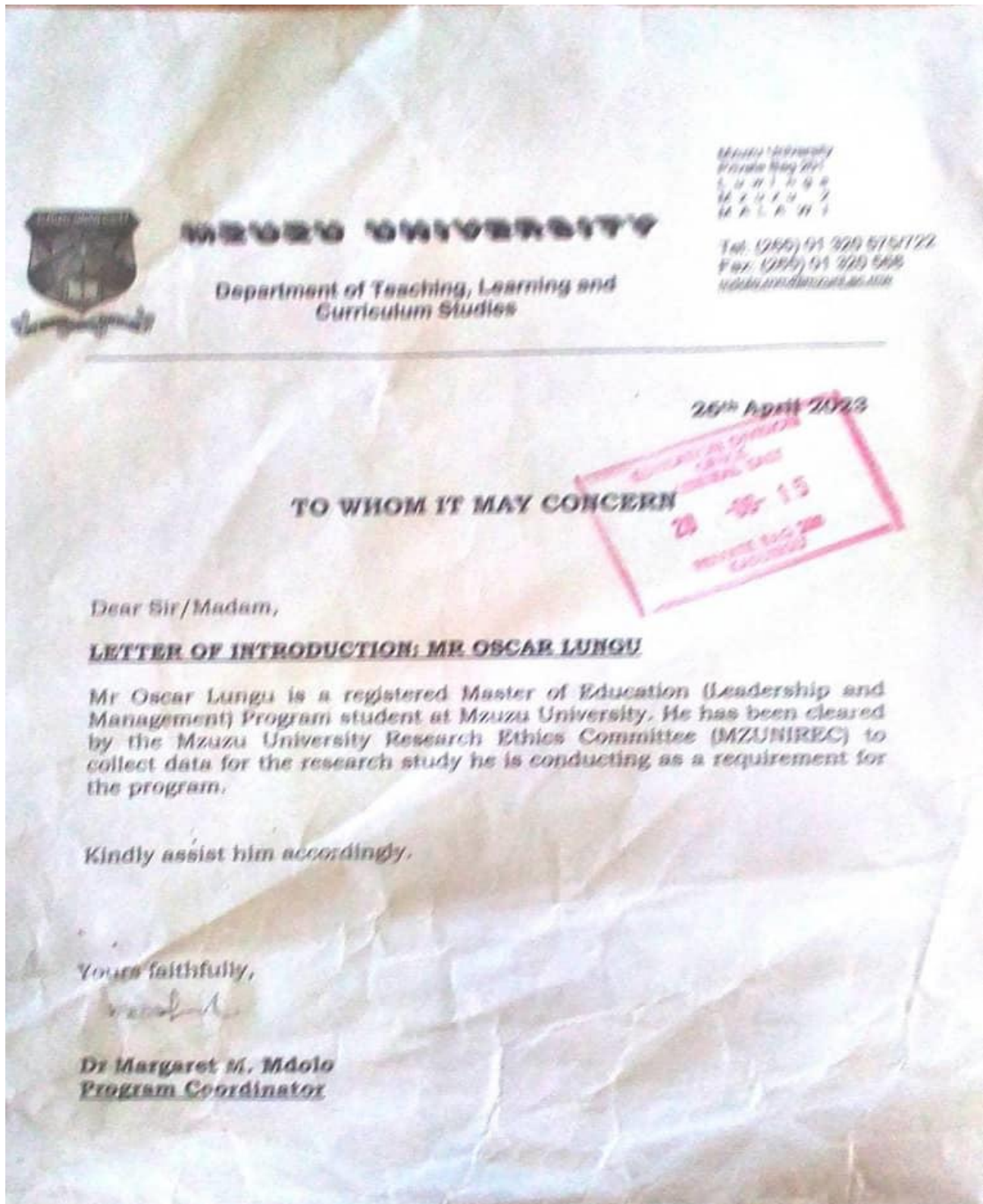
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APENDICES

Appendix A: Introduction letter from Mzuzu University



Appendix B: Introduction letter from the Division Manager (CEED)

Tel (265) 01253611/612 - 01253612
Fax(265)01253227

All correspondence to be addressed to
The Education Division Manager
Our Ref No. CEED/2/19



CENTRAL EAST EDUCATION
DIVISION, PRIVATE BAG 233,
KASUNGU

Date: 15th June, 2023

THE HEAD TEACHER

- Salima SS
- Msalura CDSS
- Malowa CDSS
- Chipoka SS

Mwambi

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY- OSCAR LUNGU

The bearer of this letter is **Oscar Lungu** who would like to conduct research study at your school as a continuation of his studies with Mzuzu University for the award of Master of Education (Leadership and Management). The schools being Salima SS, Msalura CDSS, Malowa CDSS and Chipoka SS.

Please assist him accordingly.

B. Chikhwana Banda

BILLY CHIKHWANA BANDA
EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (CEED)

Appendix C: Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) Approval



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
L u w i n g a
M z u z u 2
M A L A W I
TEL: 01 320 722

MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/26 06/04/2023.

Oscar Lungu,
Mzuzu University,
P/Bag 201,
Luwinga,
Mzuzu 2.

oelungu80@gmail.com

Dear Oscar,

**RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR
PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/26: SCHOOL MANAGERS'
IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS FOR SECONDARY
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: THE CASE OF FOUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
SALIMA DISTRICT.**

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

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

Committee Address:

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

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours sincerely,



Gift Mbwele

SENIOR RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR

For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIREC

Appendix D: Information sheet for the head of department's participation in research

My name is Oscar Eston Lungu, a postgraduate student at Mzuzu University. I am pursuing a

Master's Degree in Education Leadership and Management. I am carrying out a study on School Managers' **implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement: A case study of four selected secondary schools in Salima District**, as a partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the Master's Degree. The purpose of this study is to investigate the status of the implementation of the National Education Standards. This is based on the assumption that the successful implementation of the standards should lead to the achievement of quality of teaching and learning in the schools.

This information is provided for you to decide whether to participate in the present study or not. You are requested to participate in semi-structured interviews. Information you give in this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be accessed by any person except my supervisors and me. Information you give will be used for academic purposes only. For the sake of protecting your identity, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

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

Name: _____ **Signature:** _____

Date: _____

Oscar Eston Lungu (researcher)

Appendix D: Informed consent form for head of department.

School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement in four selected secondary schools in Salima District.

I, _____, consent to participate in this study conducted by _____ on School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement. I realise that no negative consequences will result from my participation in this study, and that the study is being conducted for the purposes of improving the implementation of the National Education Standards.

I participate voluntarily and understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Everything I say will be kept confidential by the researcher. I will only be identified by a pseudonym in the research report, and the name of the school will be kept confidential.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Information sheet for the head teachers' participation in the research.

My name is Oscar Eston Lungu, a postgraduate student at Mzuzu University. I am pursuing a

Master's Degree in Education Leadership and Management. I am carrying out a study on School Managers' **implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement: A case study of four selected secondary schools in Salima District**, as a partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the Master's Degree. The purpose of this study is to investigate the status of the implementation of the National Education Standards. This is based on the assumption that the successful implementation of the standards should lead to the achievement of quality of teaching and learning in the schools.

This information is provided for you to decide whether to participate in the present study or not. You are requested to participate in semi-structured interviews. Information you give in this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be accessed by any person except my supervisors and me. Information you give will be used for academic purposes only. For the sake of protecting your identity, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

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

Name: _____ **Signature:** _____

Date: _____

Oscar Eston Lungu (researcher)

Appendix F: Informed consent form for the head teacher.

School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement in four selected secondary schools in Salima District.

I, _____, consent to participate in this study conducted by _____ on School Managers' implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement. I realise that no negative consequences will result from my participation in this study, and that the study is being conducted for the purposes of improving the implementation of the National Education Standards.

I participate voluntarily and understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Everything I say will be kept confidential by the researcher. I will only be identified by a pseudonym in the research report, and the name of the school will be kept confidential.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Guide for Heads of Departments

Research Title: School Managers' Implementation of the National Education Standards for Secondary School Improvement: The case of four selected Secondary Schools in Salima District

Section A: Biographical Data

District:

School/Institution:

Section B

1. Did you receive any training or orientation on the Implementation of the National Education Standards?

(i) By whom?.....

(ii) Where?.....

(iii) How long was the training?.....

2. What were the strengths of the training?

(v) What were the weaknesses of the training?

3. Name any four National Educational Standards for Leadership and Management that are being implemented in your school.

4 What are your roles in the implementation process?

5. How does management make sure that the National Education Standards are being

implemented?

6. Explain the strategies you use to ensure that there is collaboration between management and members of staff.
7. Explain the strategies you use to ensure that there is collaboration between management and the community in the implementation of the NES.
8. Who is mandated to write action plans for the improvement of the school?
9. What are the roles of an action plan in the implementation of the NES for school improvement?
10. What do you think are the factors necessary for the implementation of the NES?
11. What criteria do you follow to evaluate the implementation of the NES?
12. How do you treat positive implementation of the NES?
13. How do you treat failure in the implementation of the NES?
14. Who is entrusted with the supervision of the implementation of the NES in the school?
15. (a) Have you ever been supervised by external stakeholders on the implementation of the NES?

(b) If the answer is yes, by whom and how many times have you been supervised?

(c) What were the recommendations of the external supervisors?
16. Mention any four challenges you encounter in the implementation of the NES.

17. Explain how you overcome the challenges.

THANK YOU

Appendix H: Interview guide for Head teachers and Deputy Head teachers

Research Title: School Managers' Implementation of the National Education Standards for School Improvement: The case of four Selected Secondary Schools in Salima District.

A. Section A: Biographical data

District:

School/Institution:

Name of Head-teacher interviewed:

Sex:

Age of Head-teacher:

Academic qualifications of Head-teacher:

Teaching experience of the Head-teacher:

Experience as a head teacher/ deputy head teacher.....

Number of students in the school.....

(i) Number of boys:(ii) Number of girls:

Date:

1. Did you receive any training or orientation on the Implementation of the National Education Standards?

(i) By whom?.....

(ii) Where?.....

(iii) How long was the training?.....

(iv) What were the strengths of the training?

(v) What were the weaknesses of the training?

2. Are your teachers sensitized to the implementation of the NES?

3. Name any four National Education Standards for Leadership and Management that are being implemented in the school?

4. Do you have policy documents that guide you to effectively implement the NES?

3 What are your roles in the implementation process?

4. How does management make sure that the National Education Standards are being implemented?

15. Do you engage the members of staff in the implementation process of the NES?

15. How many times have you been observing the members of staff implementing the NES?

5. Explain the strategies you use to ensure that there is collaboration between management and members of staff in the implementation of the NES.

6. Explain the strategies you use to ensure that there is collaboration between management and the community in the implementation of the NES.

7. Who is mandated to write action plans for the improvement of the school?

8. What are the roles of an action plan in the implementation of the NES for school improvement?
9. What do you think are the factors necessary for the implementation of the NES?
10. What criteria do you follow to evaluate the implementation of the NES?
11. How do you treat positive implementation of the NES?
12. How do you treat negative implementation of the NES?
13. Who is entrusted with the supervision of the implementation of the NES in the school?
14. (a) Have you ever been supervised by external stakeholders on the implementation of the NES?

(b) If the answer is yes, by whom and how many times have you been supervised?

(c) What were the recommendations of the external supervisors?
15. Mention any four challenges you encounter in the implementation of the NES.
16. How can the challenges mentioned in question (15) be overcome to improve the implementation of the NES?

THANK YOU

Appendix I: Interview Guide for Divisional Quality Assurance Officers of CEED

1. What are your professional/academic qualifications?
2. How long have you served in this position?
3. Which position did you hold before this one, and how long were you there for?
4. What do you understand to be the role of NES in the Ministry of Education (What purpose does it serve)?
5. Have you ever attended any orientation on the Implementation of the NES?
6. What role do you play in the implementation of the NES by secondary schools?
7. How often are you supposed to inspect schools on the implementation of the NES?
8. What remedies do you put in place for a school?
 - (a) Has that improved as a result of implementing the NES?
 - (b) That has failed to effectively implement the NES.
9. In your role as a Quality Assurance Officer, what are the common challenges schools encounter in the implementation of the NES?
10. How can the challenges mentioned in question (9) be overcome to improve the schools through the implementation of the NES

THANK YOU