INVESTIGATING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REFLECT THEIR PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF ZOMBA URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

MEd. (LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

CATHERINE SITILITHA MICHAEL BAYANI

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

MAY, 2014

MALAWI COLLECTION

INVESTIGATING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REFLECT THEIR PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF ZOMBA URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

M. ED (LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

By

CATHERINE SITILITHA MICHAEL BAYANI

B. Ed (Humanities) - University of Malawi

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIBRARY

Submitted to the Department Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Language Education)

University of Malawi

Chancellor College

May, 2014

DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

Catherine Sitilitha Michael Bayani

Full Legal Name

CSM Bayani

Signature

2 June 2014

Date

Chancellor College 31020001212977

MAL
275598
THE
568
BAY
2014

Certificate of Approval/Certification

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the learner's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature: _____ Date 30/05/14

Foster Kholowa, PhD (Senior Lecturer)

Main Supervisor

Signature: _____ Date 06/06/14

Mr Patrick Kapito, MA (Lecturer)

Member, Supervisory Committee



DEDICATION

To my late grandparents Mr and Mrs Mkwanda, my mother, E'Mary Nganisyo Kalipinde, and my brother, Geoffrey Michael Levi.

I thank you for bringing me up as a respectful and God-fearing woman and for labouring to get me educated under difficult social and economic circumstances. I also thank my sister, Mrs Martha Christopher Chingwalu, for your untimely support and love during the hard times I went through while I studied for this master's degree.

May God bless you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It could hardly be possible to come up with this thesis without the assistance and guidance from several sources. I do not take their efforts, sacrifice and patience for granted. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Foster Kholowa and Mr. Patrick Kapito for their tireless guidance in the work towards this dissertation even when things got out of hand. Your patience in reading and editing this long document and your encouragement inspired me to keep on forging ahead.

Second, I am also grateful to Dr Macloud Salanjira, Dr Symon Chiziwa, Dr Allan Lipenga and the entire Faculty of Education for the assistance and advice given during my writing of this dissertation.

Third, I would like to appreciate the contributions of Wisdom Murowa, Christopher Zambira, Dafren Muhamba and Frank Phiri Jr, for assisting me in computer hiccups and literacy and pestering them to go through my thesis for corrections.

Above all, I thank God for keeping me healthy during the period I was studying and guiding me on what to do when things got tough.

May God bless you all.

MALAWI COLLECTION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate language learning strategies used by secondary school learners and how they reflected their performance. The Learners' proficiency in the four English language skills in Malawian schools is still a challenge despite various efforts to ensure that learners acquire and develop proficiency in English. This has raised major concerns from various stakeholders considering the fact that English is the official language and a key to further education and employment. To achieve the above mentioned research goal, the study employed a qualitative research approach and used a phenomenological design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. The analysis of the data was done along with data collection by comparing data from different sources and tools and then developing themes and categories according to the theoretical framework and the main research questions.

The study concluded that although the learners' poor performance in English is attributed to a number of variables like large classes, unqualified teachers and home backgrounds, the way learners go about learning or the strategies they use also affect their performance. The learners used a variety of language learning strategies such as cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, social and affective in different degrees.

Through comparing the performance of above average and below average learners and the language learning strategies they used, the study found that cognitive strategies of practice, note-making and summary and reviewing; meta-cognitive strategies and the social strategy of asking questions enhanced performance. The above average learners who used them most highly also performed successfully. The cognitive strategies of rote memorization and highlighting; the social strategy of cooperating with others; compensation and affective strategies were found not enhancing performance. These were also the language learning strategies which the below average learners liked most leading to their failure.

This study makes two critical recommendations: Teachers must be conversant with different language learning strategies so that they can use them to assist learners attain skills and proficiency in English. Secondly, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should provide an enabling environment in all schools to facilitate the learning of English. Examples of the enabling environment could be provision of resources and minimizing large classes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

LIST OF OF TABLES ix

LIST OF APPENDICES x

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY 1

1.0 Chapter overview 1
1.1 Background to the study 1
1.2 Secondary school education in Malawi 3
1.3 The origin of the studies on language learning strategies 5
1.4 Statement of the problem 6
1.5 Purpose of Study 7
1.6 Key research question 7
1.6.1 Specific questions 7
1.7 Significance of the study 8
1.8 Limitations of the study 9
1.9 Definition of terms 9
1.10 Organization of the study 11
1.11 Chapter summary 11

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 12

2.0 Chapter Overview 12
2.1 The learning of English in Malawian schools 12
2.2 Language Learning Strategies definitions 16
2.3 Classification of language learning strategies (LLS) 18
2.3.1 Direct strategies 19
2.3.1.1 Cognitive strategies 19
2.3.1.2 Compensation strategies 20

2.3.2 Indirect strategies *21*
2.3.2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies *21*
2.3.2.2 Socio-affective strategies *22*
2.4 Importance of language learning strategies (LLS) *23*
2.5 Factors that influence strategy choice *24*
2.6 The relationship between language learning strategies use and learners' performance *27*
2.7 Learner training in language learning strategies *30*
2.8 Theoretical framework *31*
2.8.1 Constructivism *32*
2.8.2 The information processing model (IPM) *33*
2.8.3 Application of Vygotsky's theory on language learning strategies *35*
2.9 Chapter summary *36*

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 38

3.0 Chapter overview 38
3.1 Research design *38*
3.2 Selection of study site *39*
3.3 Sample population *39*
3.4 Data sources and sampling procedure *40*
3.5 Data collection *41*
3.5.1 In-depth interviews *41*
3.5.2 Focus group discussions *42*
3.5.3 Class observations *42*
3.6 Data management and analysis *43*
3.7 Piloting of the study *44*
3.8 Access negotiations *44*
3.9 Ethical issues *45*
3.10 Anonymity and confidentiality *45*
3.11 Enhancing credibility and authenticity of the study *45*
3.12 Chapter summary *46*

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 47

4.0 Chapter overview 47
4.1 Cognitive strategies used by secondary school English learners 47
4.1.1 Practising strategies *49*
4.1.1.1 Practice in listening and speaking *51*
4.1.1.2 Practice in English writing *55*
4.1.1.3 Practice in English reading and performance *58*

4.1.2 Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy.....60
4.1.2.1 Note taking and and summary.....61
4.1.2.2 Highlighting.....63
4.1.3Memorization.....65
4.1.3.1 Rote memorization.....67
4.1.3.2 Reviewing work done.....69
4.2 Compensation strategies used by secondary school learners.....71
4.2.1 Code-switching.....72
4.2.2 Delaying when speaking.....75
4.2.3 Avoiding communication partially or totally.....76
4.3 Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners.....78
4.3.1 Paying attention.....79
4.3.2 Organising and planning for one's learning.....82
4.3.2.1 Organising.....83
4.3.2.2 Finding out about their learning.....85
4.3.2.3 Setting goals and objectives.....88
4.3.3 Evaluating one's learning.....91
4.3.3.1 Self-monitoring.....92
4.3.3.2 Self-evaluation.....94
4.4 Affective strategies used by learners.....97
4.4.1 Lowering one's anxiety.....97
4.4.1.1 Knowing that they were not alone in their fears.....99
4.4.1.2 Using relaxation to lower their anxiety.....101
4.4.2 Taking one's emotional temperature.....103
4.4.2.1 Listening to one's body.....104
4.4.2.2 Discussing feelings with someone else.....106
4.5 Social strategies used by learners.....*108*
4.5.1 Asking questions.....109
4.5.2 Cooperating with others.....111
4.6 Chapter summary.....*114*

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....116

5.0 Chapter overview.....116
5.1 Key issues.....116
5.2 Recommendations.....119
5.3 Areas for further research.....120

REFERENCES.....121
APPENDICES.....130

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Cognitive strategies used by learners..... 48

Table 2: Practice as a cognitive strategy.....51

Table 3: Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy.....61

Table 4: Memorization as a sub- cognitive strategy.....66

Table 5: Compensation strategies used by learners.....72

Table 6: Metacognitive strategies used by learners 78

Table 7: Organising and planning as a meta-cognitive strategy.....82

Table 8: Evaluation as a meta-cognitive strategy.....91

Table 9: Affective strategies used by learners.....97

Table 10: Lowering anxiety as an affective strategy 98

Table 11: Taking emotional temperature as an affective strategy.....103

Table 12: Social strategies used by learners.....108

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for learners.....130

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for teachers.....132

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Dowe CDSS teacher 2, on 06/09/2010.....133

APPENDIX 4: Focus group discussion questions.....141

APPENDIX 5: Observation schedule.....142

APPENDIX 6: A sample of learners' progress report (surnames removed for anonymity).....143

APPENDIX 7: Letter of permission to conduct a research at the South East Education Division (SEED).....145

APPENDIX 8: A sample letter to head teachers asking for permission to conduct a research in their secondary schools.....146

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CDSS:	Community Day Secondary School
DEC:	Distance Education Centre
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
IPM:	Information Processing Model
LSS:	Language Learning strategies
MANEB:	Malawi National Examinations Board
MIE:	Malawi Institute of Education
MOEST:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MSCE:	Malawi School Certificate of Education
SEED:	South East Education Division
SQ3R:	Survey Question Read Review Recite
UDF:	United Democratic Front
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the basis for the entire thesis. It begins with the background of the study which is secondary school education in Malawi and the origin of the studies on language learning strategies. The second part gives the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, study limitations and the definition of terms.

1.1 Background to the study

Historically, the critical poor performance of both primary and secondary schools pupils in Malawi may have largely originated from the sudden declaration of the free primary education in 1994 which led to primary school enrolment almost doubling from 1.8 to 3.2 million between 1994 and 1997 (Presidential committee on quality education, 2000). This resulted in large classes, unqualified and insufficient teachers and inadequate resources (Chimombo, 2005; Commonwealth Education Fund Strategic Plan for Malawi, 2003-2005). In addition, these increased enrolments resulted in having large numbers of learners compared to the places which were available in secondary schools. To provide access to secondary school education, distance education centres (DECs) were renamed community day secondary schools (CDSSs) by the United Democratic Front (UDF) Government. This decision was made without much preparation in terms of ensuring that qualified teachers, infrastructure and learning materials were available and adequate

(Chimombo, 2005). The introduction of community day secondary schools therefore greatly contributed to the poor quality of education, low performance, increase in examination cheating and lack of motivation among these learners. The situation resulted in learners being unruly, disobedient, violent and unmotivated to learn and saw school rules and discipline measures as a violation of their freedom and human rights (Presidential committee on quality education, 2000).

Poor performance of learners remains a big challenge because although efforts are being made to slowly address some of these problems, many community day secondary schools (CDSSs) and few secondary schools still have large classes, unqualified teachers, poor infrastructure and insufficient teaching and learning materials. These challenges lead to teachers using non-participatory methods that lack room for practice and use of different learning strategies by learners.

In Malawi, English is taught in schools as a second language and it is also the official language of the country. It is the medium of instruction in education and a compulsory subject in all the schools (Matiki, 2001). English enjoys a high status in Malawi and generally, proficiency in English is one of the measurements of one's level of education (Matiki, 2001). However, a number of studies in Malawi have also shown that acquiring proficiency in English language in areas where it is a second language is a challenge. It has been revealed that many learners in Malawi face difficulties in learning English as a second language and many perform poorly (Matiki, 2001, & Presidential enquiry on quality education, 2000). Various studies have attributed the learners' poor performance to a number of factors such as teacher-pupil ratio, inadequate teacher training and lack of

appropriate teaching and learning materials (Department of Research, Evaluation, & Policy Studies Report, 2009; Chimombo, 2005). In Malawi, there is inadequate literature on how the learner's efforts and techniques to learning affect their performance and the language learning strategies they use to acquire competence in English. It is of great interest to find out from learners the strategies which they employ to learn and how such strategies affect their performance.

1.2 Secondary school education in Malawi

In Malawian government schools, a learner generally undergoes three levels: primary (eight years), secondary (four years) and tertiary levels of education. Secondary education is offered mainly through five types of schools which include grant aided, conventional, community day secondary schools, private schools and open distance learning schools. Grant aided secondary schools are high quality schools with adequate resources. Many are run by non-profitable organizations like church denominations but are government sponsored. Others are special government secondary schools found especially in every region of Malawi. It is where learners who perform very well at national level go to. Secondly, conventional secondary schools are government district secondary schools and learners selected to these schools are those who score high marks at district level. Community day secondary schools are schools where learners who did not score very highly during the national examinations are selected to. In these schools, those who just passed but were not selected because of low scores and those who completely failed easily find places. This leads to the enrolment being higher than the recommended of at least fifty students per class. In addition, these high enrolments lead

to classes having large numbers of below average learners. Private schools are those run by profit making owners and are expensive. Only those learners with well to do parents manage to go to these schools. Open distance schools which are also called night schools are those schools that are run in the secondary schools after normal classes. They are mainly for adults and those who dropped out or failed to get places at the secondary schools. The secondary level of education is divided into two sections which are junior (forms one to two) and senior (forms three to four). Transition from one section to another is determined by passing government national examinations with English proficiency serving as the final determiner for getting a pass score (Mmela, 2006).

Some of the objectives of secondary educationin Malawi are that learners develop effective communicative skills, apply problem solving techniques to new situations, develop good study skills necessary for intellectual growth and personal advancement and develop the spirit of inquiry and independent thinking (Malawi Institute of Education, 2002). Practically, these objectives are not achieved by many learners because of several factors including how they go about learning and the strategies they use. Vermont (1996) concurs that the learning activities that learners employ to a larger extent determine the quality of the learning outcome they achieve. By form one, learners are expected to be conversant in English. Secondary school instruction material and examinations are written in English (Friends of Malawi, 2004). However, Malawian school learner achievement in English is critically low (Mmela, 2006).

Many learners entering CDSS cannot understand English sufficiently to grasp the lessons. Thus it can be equally a challenge for learners to understand the questions in the examinations so as to answer them (Friends of Malawi, 2004).

In Malawi, the topic of language learning strategies is applied and appears in learners' textbooks especially after some units or chapters. However, to learners and some teachers, the word 'strategy' is not frequently mentioned. The common similar words used are learning tactics, techniques or learning how to learn. Consequently, learning strategy training may not be taken seriously as compared to other contexts where there is structured learner training within the curriculum. The investigation of learners' language learning strategies in Malawian Secondary schools might therefore reveal further causes of the poor performance by some learners.

1.3 The origin of the studies on language learning strategies

Literature on learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from concern with identifying the characteristics of effective learners. Research efforts concentrating on the "good language learner" had identified strategies reported by learners or observed in language learning situations that appear to contribute to learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). These studies noted that good language learners used more appropriate strategies to learn a language. They were flexible in their approach, had confidence in their learning ability, were motivated and expected to succeed in fulfilling their expectations. Successful learners tended to use learning strategies that were appropriate to the material, to the task, and to their own goals, needs, and stage of learning. (Celce- Murcia, 2001).

Researchers like Wenden and Rubin (1987) found that to improve competence, the below average learners could be helped to become effective by being trained on what expert or good language learners do. Wenden and Rubin (1987) concurs that it is assumed that once the strategies of the good language learner are identified, they can be made available and where useful, used by less successful learners to enable them to learn a foreign or second language more effectively.

However, later studies found that there was no single set of strategies always used by the good language learner. They found that less able learners used strategies randomly, in an unconnected and uncontrolled manner while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant systematic way at specific second language or foreign (L2) tasks (Abraham & Van, 1990; Chamot, 2003).

1.4 Statement of the problem

English occupies a central role in the socio-economic arena in Malawi. For instance, if one fails English he or she cannot obtain an academic certificate. This being the case, learners get more interested in passing examinations and ignore some important learning strategies necessary for language use in real contexts. A number of studies have revealed that learners in Malawi have difficulties in acquiring the necessary competencies in English language (Chimombo, Kunje, Chimuzu & Mchikoma 2005; Matiki, 2001). This situation affects both their ability to communicate effectively and their academic performance. A lot of factors have been said to contribute to English language failure, for example, lack of teaching and learning resources (Department of Research, Evaluation &

Policies report, 2009). However, it has been noted that in other schools where there are few resources, learners do perform well. In addition, in one school, other things being equal, some learners do better than others. Therefore, it is argued that it could not only be resources, differences in school factors, intelligence or teacher training that contribute to learning and competence as indicated by Aijaz (2001). Some individual and social attributes on the part of the learners are some of the contributing factors to the individual variations in the learning of English. Literature on language leaning calls such individual learning attributes to language learning, learning strategies. Wenden and Rubin (1987) concurs with the idea that some learners' success can be attributed to particular sets of cognitive, meta-cognitive and social behaviours which learners engage in. It is from this background this study aimed to investigate how the language learning strategies which English learners in secondary schools used affected their performance in English.

1.5 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the language learning strategies that learners used and how the use of such strategies reflected their performance in English.

1.6 Key research question

How do the language learning strategies which learners use affect their performance?

1.6.1 Specific questions

1. Which language learning strategies do learners use?
2. Howare these language learning strategies used?

3. What is the relationship between the language learning strategies learners use and their performance in English?

MALAWI COLLECTION

1.7 Significance of the study

There is very limited research on how learning strategies used by learners affect their performance in Malawian schools. Therefore, through learner training, this study will serve as one of the means of dealing with the serious problem of English language incompetence among learners. It will also serve to enrich our understanding of how learners learn English, how to respond to difficulties in learning and the insights we can gain from these. The study will also inform curriculum developers on the language strategies that Malawian learners use to learn English successfully so that the instructional materials they develop could contain activities and learning methodologies that could enhance effective learning. The study will also provide a missing link in research literature on the topic.

At a more practical level, the findings of this study could help university trainee teachers at training institutions to use those methodologies that supplement the language learning strategies used by learners in the classroom. Doing a research on learning strategies will help trainee teachers to fit well in the current language curriculum which encourages learner-centred activities and autonomous learning. This approach to teaching reinforces the use of many language learning strategies. The new teachers' knowledge from college will also help learners to know how to recognize the learning gaps in Malawian schools. It will also stimulate and encourage further research in the area.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in four schools in Zomba Urban. These were two boarding secondary schools and two community day secondary schools (CDSSs). The study proposed to interview four form three teachers per school but there were only two per school. This affected the study by reducing the number of participants. In addition, the study proposed to select above and below average learners with the assistance from teachers and progress reports starting from forms one to three. Some reports especially for the former years could not be found due to teachers' change of posting and learners who just joined the schools. Although these limitations might have had some implications for the outcomes of the study, the researcher made an effort to select learners who were above and below average using the available progress reports and the recommendations from teachers. These facts entail that the findings may not be generalized to the whole South East Education Division (SEED) or in the whole Malawi as a country. However, the findings of the study can be simply generalized within the context of the participating schools.

1.9 Definition of terms

The following terms are defined as follows in the context of this study:

Autonomy: It is the making of learning free from the bounds of any institution, and how the individual can reclaim control of and responsibility for his or her own education, while investigating the opportunities to learn from a variety of authentic sources. (British council, 1978, p.9).

Communicative competence: It is competence or ability to communicate. It concerns

both spoken and written language and all the four language skills.

Communicative competence has a comprehensive four part definition: grammatical competence or accuracy, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Oxford, 1990, p.7)

Communication strategies: They are techniques used by speakers when faced with some difficulty due to the fact that their communication ends outrun their communication means or when confronted with misunderstanding by a co-speaker (Faerch & Kasper, 1985).

Competence: Refers to what the learner knows (Chomsky, 1965; Llurda, 2011).

Foreign language: A language studied in an environment where it is not the primary vehicle for daily interaction and where input in that language is restricted (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Learning styles: Refers to the general approaches that learners use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject (Oxford, 1990).

Learning strategies: Steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1990).

Performance: What the learner actually does. It is a measure of results achieved and is concerned with learner ability (Chomsky, 1965).

Second language: A language studied in a setting where the language is the main vehicle of everyday communication (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

L2: Either a second or foreign language (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

1.10 Organization of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the problem. It presents the general background of the study stating the statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions and definition of operational terms. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and provides the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 comprises the research methodology. It explains the research design and how the data was analyzed with justification for methods used. It also explains the study site and sample of the study. Chapter 4 gives the results and discussion of the findings. It discusses what was observed and what it entails. Finally chapter 5 makes conclusions of the findings and recommendations of the study.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has given the background to the study which has also laid the basis of the whole thesis. It has further discussed secondary school education in Malawi, learner performance and the origin of studies in language learning strategies. In addition, a statement of the problem has been provided followed by the purpose of the study which includes the outline of the research questions that the study sought to explore. The chapter concludes by presenting the significance of the study to the field of teaching and learning, limitations and definition of terms.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of literature on language learning strategies which learners use and how they affect learners' performance. It begins by describing the learning of English in Malawian schools; defining and classifying language learning strategies; the motivation of using different language learning strategies (LLS); factors which influence learners in their choice of LLS and there after the relationship between language learning strategy use and performance and learner training are also discussed. Furthermore, the chapter discusses constructivism which is the theoretical framework that guides the study. As part of constructivism, the information processing model (IPM) is also discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses how the theoretical framework can be applied to LLS use.

2.1 The learning of English in Malawian schools

According to Matiki (2001), to many Malawians, economic success is predicted by one's ability to speak, read and write English. Many people throw in a lot of English words and phrases in their conversation when using vernacular languages. This means that the symbolic and attitudinal implication of English is greater than those of the indigenous languages (Matiki, 2001). This motivates learners in Malawi to make efforts to learn English but still performance in schools is not up to the standard (Department of

Research Evaluation & policy studies, 2009). The link between the declining standards in education in general and the poor performance in English in particular was made clear in recent consultative work for a Presidential Commission of Inquiry in the year 2000. The Commission noted that poor English skills both spoken and written were frequently cited by the stakeholders as indicators of the falling standards in education (Matiki, 2001). Furthermore, commenting on the 13% pass rate in the 1999/2000 Malawi School Certificate Examination (MSCE), one letter to the editor blamed the pervasive use of literal translations of Chichewa expressions into English by learners as indicators of the learners' lack of proficiency (Chagunda, 2000, p. 4). The above statements indicate that the issue of poor performance among learners especially in English originates from learners' poor background right from the primary school where it was not a priority for being promoted to the next class.

Kholowa (1999) did research concerning teaching and learning and examinations. He stipulated that research has shown that lack of competence in English among learners is a result of several factors but one of them is that learners are not given enough practice because teachers are more interested in teaching what is examinable than simply making pupils able to communicate. Satterly (1989) concurs that the pursuit of examination success has sometimes resulted in scanty attention to the need to show pupils how to learn (as cited in Kholowa, 1999, p. 29). For example, one of the participants in the Kholowa (1999) study said that if learners are left to work with little effort from the teacher, they will waste time on useless things outside the teaching syllabus which will lead to their failure during examinations. This statement is not in line with the Malawian

curricula which is learner-centred and expects the learners to take charge of their own learning. Examination oriented teaching and learning can hinder learners from life long learning. Learners need to take responsibility for their own learning while the teacher should be there as a facilitator and guide.

Dzama (2006) investigated the problem of poor performance in Science among learners in Malawian secondary schools. Apart from the lack of practice, he explains that learners are not involved in their own learning which contributes to poor performance among them. Furthermore, Dzama concluded that among the many causes of poor performance of learners in physical science, learners had limited knowledge of learning skills, lacked self control and had poor management of study time. Dzama added that learners mostly used strategies merely for reproducing class work with very shallow understanding resulting into poor performance. According to the researcher, Dzama's study was concerned with Physical Science only but most of his findings could also apply to why the learners' performances are low in the other subjects including English. For example, on the use of strategies merely for reproducing class work without seriously involving their mental processes to understand the content. Such learners become passive and believe that the teacher is the only knowledgeable. Learners' involvement helps them to understand and remember what they learn. Only the idea one has created by oneself leaves a mark on one's understanding that can be used on a later occasion. Involvement in one's learning is important and can make the learner easily apply what is learnt in real life situations outside the classroom.

MALAWI COLLECTION

Kishindo et al. (2005) conducted a research study on the learner achievement in Mathematics, English, science and Chichewa in Malawian primary schools in standards three, five, and seven. The results showed that in all the four subjects including English, less than 10% of the learners were adequately prepared for the upper class into which they were promoted to. Secondly, learner achievement in English was rated third highest with science having the least performance. Furthermore, research findings by UNESCO also concur that only a small proportion of children in Malawi are reaching the minimum required competencies and our education system is not performing to the standards we expect them (UNESCO, 2000, p.28). Related to the Kishindo et al. (2005) study, Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2008) study also showed that standard three learners performed relatively better in numeracy and mathematics but their performance in English was the lowest with a percentage mean of 5.79. MoEST (2008) also reported that one of the challenges to be addressed if the system of education is to improve in Malawi is poor learning achievement citing only 50% of learners passing end of cycle examinations.This poor background could cause learning problems for the whole school system because if learners' performance is poor in English but they still proceed to the next class where the language is more advanced, the situation worsens. This can lead to frustrations and lack of motivation.

Lipenga (2011) did research concerning the English teaching strategies and methods used in primary schools for the development of language proficiency. Among other things he found that learners were put in large groups of 10-12 learners per group. As a result there was a lot of noise which came about due to the large groups and failure by teachers to

control the learners. Lipenga's study also established that learners used Chichewa for discussions which defeated all the efforts to develop English language proficiency amongst learners. In his study, teachers stated that due to the large classes, they did not mind whether learners had understood and acquired the English language or not, provided they taught. This situation can also apply to some secondary schools in Malawi. The above sentiments indicate that some teachers contribute to their learners' low performance by lacking commitment to help learners use different learning strategies. They use group work because of lack of resources, to ease their work and not to allow learners to learn from each other through interaction. Groups which are not well organized and monitored can reduce learners' motivation to learn leading to disturbances and only few learners participating. The rest may use the group work time for chatting and writing exercises for other subjects.

2.2 Language learning strategies definitions

According to Oxford (1990), the word "strategy" comes from a Greek term 'strategia' which means steps or actions generals take for the purpose of winning a war. It is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose; the process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skilful way. Lee (2010) compares learning strategies to footballers who use tactics in order to win a game when they are in a stadium. With reference to learners, the definitions are based on the assumption that the learners plan and are consciously engaged in activities to achieve certain goals and they exercise a choice of procedures. They always think of the solutions or steps to take in order to solve the language problems they encounter during learning. Several authors have defined

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE - LIBRARY

language learning strategies (LLS). According to Oxford (1990), LLS are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques which learners use – often consciously- to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the second or foreign language (L2). They are actions taken by learners to control and improve their own learning. Strategies are tools for the self–directed involvement necessary for developing communication ability (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Faerch, Claus, and Casper (1983) define a learning strategy as an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Thus from the definitions, learning responsibility is more in the hands of the learner than the teacher. Even with the best teachers and methods, learners are the only ones who can actually do the learning. Furthermore, strategies are behaviours that are amenable to change. They can be modified or rejected and unfamiliar ones can be learnt (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.8). They are part of software and are flexible. That is, they are not always found in predictable sequences or in precise patterns. There is a great deal of individuality in the way learners choose, combine and sequence strategies (Oxford, 1990, p.13). From these characteristics, language learning strategies can change according to the task and choices of the learner on what works best. These variations contribute to the differences in their performance.

Learning strategies are related to learning styles because they both determine how well a learner will learn a language (Oxford, 1990). Celce-Murcia (2001) defines learning styles as an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills. They are different from learning strategies in that strategies vary widely within an individual, while styles are more constant and

predictable. To make it more clear, a learning style is the biological and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This shows that individual learning styles play a role in learners' choices of different learning strategies. Although these styles can be natural or developmental, teachers still have a role to encourage learners to switch to other styles which aid learning like combination of being visual, auditory and tactile.

2.3 Classification of language learning strategies (LLS)

Different authors have compiled learning strategies which vary in length, scope and terminology. Some are shorter and others longer but comprise more or less similar categories. According to Oxford (1990) and Cajkler and Addelman (2000), language learning strategies are grouped into two main groups. These are direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are grouped into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are grouped into meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Wenden and Rubin (1987) classified strategies into learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. There after, they classified LLS into three; cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Stern (1992) classified them into five: management and planning strategies, cognitive, communicative-experiential strategies, interpersonal strategies and affective strategies. In addition, Cohen's (1996) typology comprises retrieval, rehearsal, coping or cover and communication strategies. Below is a discussion of these different language learning strategies.

2.3.1 Direct strategies

Oxford (1990) defines direct strategies as those that involve the target language. She further states that all direct strategies require mental processes (p.37). Cajkler and Addelman (2000) call them language specific strategies. Examples of direct strategies are cognitive, memory and compensation strategies. These have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.3.1.1 Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations used in learning or problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation, synthesis of learning materials (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.23). They enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means (Oxford, 1990). Examples of cognitive strategies are rehearsal, organisation or grouping, inference and summarising (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Among the different authors, Oxford (1990) is the only one who included memory strategies in her typology. Cohen (1996) calls them retrieval strategies.

Memory strategies are sometimes called mnemonics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). They are strategies for the storage and retrieval of information. Thompson, a co-author in Wenden and Rubin (1987) states that it is difficult to think of any educational goal for which the ability to retain information is unimportant. The other authors, for example, Stern (1992); Wenden and Rubin (1987) included memory as a cognitive strategy. Although Oxford's classification is one of the latest and more detailed, the researcher concurs with the other authors like O'Malley and Chamot (1990) that memory strategies

could be included as part of cognitive strategies because mental processes are involved for one to remember and retrieve what she or he has learnt.

2.3.1.2 Compensation strategies

Compensation strategies are those that enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations of knowledge (Oxford, 1990). Stern (1992) calls them communicative – experiential strategies while Cohen (1996) calls them coping or cover strategies. Examples of these strategies are guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990). Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing includes code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication.

Code-switching means a phenomenon of changing from one language to another in the same discourse (Kalong, 2008). Code-switching seems to serve a significant communicative and cognitive function in a conversation. It plays the roles of facilitating, supporting and encouraging thinking and communication. Kalong (2008) states that code switching can both facilitate and hinder the learning of English. It can also be considered as a helpful method in the classroom as new content and new knowledge are able to be transmitted to the learners effectively. The statements do not specify the degree of code-switching and the stage of learners at which code-switching can be suitable. If it is too much it can lead to learners using less English words compared to Chichewa and missing the meaning of practising the target language. The use of code-switching in learning the target language may also lead to loss of fluency in the target language. The more frequent

learners use code-switching, the bigger the chance of them to face fluency loss in mastering the language. Furthermore, the over use of the native language may deprive learners of the needed input. Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Wenden and Rubin (1987) do not classify compensation strategies as language learning strategies. Instead they call them communication strategies. These authors do not recognise communication strategies as learning strategies because they believe communication is the output modality while learning is the input modality. In the researcher's opinion, what is important is that communication or compensation strategies, whether included as learning strategies or separated, aid in language learning as well. Each instance of second language use is an opportunity for more learning of the language.

2.3.2 Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies are those that contribute to learning indirectly. They are for the general management of learning. They support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language (Oxford, 1990). Cajkler and Addelman (2000) call them general private strategies. Examples of these strategies are meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). These have been discussed further below.

2.3.2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies

The word meta-cognitive means beyond, beside or within the cognitive (Oxford, 1990, p.136). Meta-cognitive strategies are those that involve thinking about the learning process, planning for the learning, monitoring of learning while it is taking place and self evaluation of learning after the learning activity (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). They are

MALAWI COLLECTION

actions used by learners for the general management of their learning (Oxford, 1990). Meta-cognitive strategies help to improve the organisation of learning time, self monitoring and self evaluation. It refers to higher order thinking that involves active control over the cognitive processes which influence learning (Livingston, 1997). Stern (1992) calls these strategies as management and planning strategies. This means they are associated with the learners' intention to direct their own learning. Examples of meta-cognitive strategies are paying attention, planning for the language task and self evaluation (Oxford, 1990). Thus language learners are often over whelmed by too much work like literature books to read, unfamiliar vocabulary and confusing rules. This can make them lose focus. Meta-cognitive strategies are important because their use help learners to regain their focus get organised and schedule their time.

2.3.2.2 Socio-affective strategies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) combine the social and affective strategies while other authors like Oxford (1990) separate them. The researcher suggests that it is better to separate social and affective strategies because although they both involve groups they are different. Social strategies are activities learners engage in which afford them opportunities to be exposed to and practise their knowledge (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Stern (1992) calls them interpersonal strategies. These strategies help the learner to ask for help from competent people and develop good classroom climate with good relationships (Oxford, 1990). Social strategies can be grouped into asking questions,

co-operating with others and empathising with others (Oxford, 1990). Thus, language is a form of behaviour. It is communication and communication occurs between and among people. Learners learn through interaction.

Furthermore, the term affective refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations and values. The affective part of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language success or failure. For example, if the learner does not like the culture of the target language, he or she cannot be motivated to learn. Some of the affective strategies are lowering ones anxiety and encouraging oneself (Oxford, 1990).

A large overlap exists among the strategy groups. For example, guessing is a communication strategy used to make up for the missing knowledge but also requires reasoning which is a cognitive strategy. Oxford (1990) also adds that there is no complete agreement on how many language learning strategies (LLS) exist and how they should be demarcated and categorised. This indicates that research on the taxonomy of language learning strategies is still underway. One strategy can belong to more than one group. For example, intelligent guessing can be a compensation strategy but at the same time a cognitive strategy. This is because for one to guess, mental processes are also applied.

2.4 Importance of language learning strategies (LLS)

Language learning strategies contribute to the main goal of communicative competence by helping learners' participation in authentic communication (Oxford, 1990). They give teachers valuable clues about how their learners plan and these help them to select

appropriate skills. Learning strategies simplify and make learning faster, more enjoyable and more self directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Learning becomes efficient and effective and learners become independent (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Prevatt (2006) states that determination of learning and study strategies can help to screen and identify learners at risk of poor performance; be used diagnostically to evaluate areas of difficulty and be useful in advising learners seeking a better awareness of their academic strengths and weaknesses (as cited in Ngwira, 2010, p. 2). The language learner builds up learner independence and autonomy whereby the learners can take control of their own learning (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Thus, the study of good language learner would also help good learners with a talent for languages to make the best possible use of their abilities. This shows that the use of appropriate strategies often results in improved achievement overall or in specific areas. Training learners to use learning strategies can help them become better language learners. From the above strengths, LLS are very important tools that promote active learning with the teacher as a facilitator.

2.5 Factors that influence strategy choice

Learners vary in the frequency and types of strategies they use. Many factors affect the choice of strategies. For example, the degree of awareness, task requirements, teacher expectation, sex, culture, general learning style, personality traits and motivation level (Oxford, 1990). The following is a discussion of some factors that influence learner choice of different LLS.

Firstly, the degree of awareness affects learners' choice of LLS. Learners who are more aware and more advanced seem to use better strategies than those who are not aware and less advanced (Oxford, 1990, p. 13). Higher level learners are more able to use strategies than the lower level learners. Research has found that less able learners use strategies in a random, unconnected and uncontrolled manner where as more effective learners show careful orchestration of strategies used in a systematic way.

Secondly, task type and requirement guides the strategy choice. Studies by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) found that learners reported using the highest frequency for vocabulary learning tasks and oral drills. The lowest frequencies were for listening comprehension, inference and making an oral presentation. The statements indicate that learners choose learning strategies depending on the task at hand. Learners would not use the same strategies for writing a composition as for bargaining in a shop.

Thirdly, teacher expectation also affects the learner's choice of LLS. The classroom instructional and testing methods strongly shape learner strategies. For instance, classroom emphasis on discrete-point grammar learning will result in the development of LLS like analysis and reasoning rather than more global strategies for communication (Oxford, 1990). The findings reveal that the teacher has a role to play in providing an environment which facilitates the use of those strategies which work best for learners. One way of doing this is by promoting the learner-centred methods of teaching.

Fourthly, the general learning style such as field dependence-independence, analytic-global orientation or the judging-perceiving mode has a strong effect on strategies learners use (Oxford, 1990). For example, a learner who is a visual learner may naturally use imagery as a preferred strategy.

Recent studies indicate that females may use a much wider or at least a wider range of strategies than males for language learning (Oxford, 1990). However, Radwan (2011) in his study of investigating language learning strategies (LLS) used by 128 learners majoring in English at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman found that there was no significant difference between male and female learners in the overall use of strategies. In the researcher's opinion, Oxford's study does not tell us at what stage females use better strategies than males and why. The same studies done indicating females using a wider range of strategies cannot be easily transferable to every context because of differences in cultural factors. In some cultures male learners dominate. Males and females can vary in the use of strategies according to stages and motivation.

In addition, nationality and ethnicity influences strategy use. According to Oxford (1990), Hispanics seem to use social strategies more than do other ethnic groups. Harvey (1985) also found that in China, culture contributed to learners' choice of LLS leading to using a lot of rote memorization strategies. Harvey (1985) also noted that quite a big number of English as Foreign Language (EFL) Chinese learners are not so called good language learners because they generally would not like to make inferences about the meanings of words or sentences, to pay too little attention to communication skills, being

corrected and concentrate largely on grammatical structures. Their choice of strategies originated from their culture in which diligence in learning had been greatly stressed and highly praised since the emergence of the ancient civil examination "Ke Ju." In order to obtain higher marks and step higher on the power ladder, candidates had to learn a lot of ancient classics by rote memorization.

Finally, Oxford (1990) states that more highly motivated learners use significantly greater range of strategies than do less motivated learners. Learners who have set goals to achieve will apply different strategies to succeed. For instance, individuals who want to learn a new language mainly for interpersonal communication will use different strategies than learners who want to learn a new language merely to fulfill a graduation requirement (Oxford, 1990). From the above discussion, motivation and goals set direct the quality of strategies which learners use. For example, a learner who has the goal of going to the university will differ in some choices of strategies with one who just aims at getting a certificate.

2.6 The relationship between language learning strategies use and learners' performance

Chomsky (1965) defined competence as what the learner knows and performance as what the learner actually does. In other words, performance is a measure of the results achieved and is concerned with learner ability. Celce-Murcia (2001) asserts that the use of LLS is demons ratably related to learner achievement proficiency and that in light of this remarkable association between LLS use and positive learning outcomes, it is not

surprising that learners who frequently employ learning strategies enjoy a higher level of efficacy which is perception of being effective learners.

In Botswana, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) explored the relationship between the use of preferred language learning strategies and proficiency. The findings reveal that Botswana learners do use language learning strategies and that there is a dynamic relationship between the use of LLS and proficiency. Related to this study, Ya-Ling Wu (2008) did a study in Taiwan. He found that higher proficiency English as a foreign language (EFL) learners use language learning strategies more than lower proficiency learners, especially cognitive, meta-cognitive and social strategies. On the other hand, there was no difference in the use of memory strategies between the higher and lower proficiency EFL learners. Regarding the relationship between LLS and English proficiency, Ya-Ling Wu found that cognitive strategies had the strongest influence. His findings also revealed that compensation strategies were most often used by EFL learners. From the discussions, all types of learners used memory strategies similarly because they were influenced by the looming examinations. The difference could be that the high proficiency learners used meaningful memory strategies and mixed them with other cognitive strategies in order to be successful.

Jurkovic (2008) conducted research on the correlation between competence and LLS use at University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. The study also found that the first strongest correlation was found between the frequency use of cognitive strategies and language competence. Ehirman and Oxford (1990) also conducted a study among 520 highly

educated native speakers of English, working for the United States administration bodies, on whether language progress correlates with the frequency use of cognitive strategies. Similar to Jarkovic, they also found that language progress most strongly correlates with the frequency use of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, Jurkovic (2008) concluded that the social negative correlation was because learners that had reached lower levels of language competence before enrolment in a tertiary education institution feel the need to cooperate with their peers and other users of English while the same need is absent amongst learners at a higher level of competence. Learners with higher levels of language competence also seem to be more aware of their needs and evaluate the progress they are making. The study does not tell us whether there was correlation between the use of meta-cognitive strategies and competence. In addition, there was no reason given why mainly the learners of higher levels used this strategy.

In another related study, Shmais (2003) did a study that involved 120 learners majoring in English in Palestine. He concluded that learners at higher levels of language competence are more aware of their learning needs and more frequently look for opportunities for learning themselves. On the other hand, the frequency of use of affective and social strategies seemed to be negatively correlated with language competence. Learners at higher levels of language competence used cognitive strategies more often and social and affective strategies less often than their less successful learners.

The different findings reveal that cognitive strategies enhance performance and that effective learners use those most. The negative correlation between affective and social

strategies and competence found by different authors indicate that learners at lower levels of language competence tend to be tenser and anxious when learning second or foreign languages which may hinder their learning process and thus lead to poor results. However, Mullins (1992) found that high level learners used compensation strategies most and it led to their high performance. The reason for variation in the findings could also be a result of differences in contexts. Jurkovic (2008) further states that it is not merely quantity but the quality of LLS. The results showed that there was a strong relationship between language learning strategy use and competence which possibly indicates that language progress can be enhanced through strategy instruction. In addition, Fewell (2010) did research in Japan on the relationship between LLS use and proficiency. In this study an English major group indicated the opposite. English proficiency level increased when LLS utilization decreased. In the researcher's opinion, this could be because of the Japanese learning system of emphasizing rote learning. Researchers have noted similarities in Asian learners adopting rote learning as a primary strategy and it could also be due to institutional constraints in emphasizing standardized testing.

2.7 Learner training in language learning strategies

Several authors like Wenden and Rubin (1987) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) found that in order to improve competence in learners, LLS can be taught. Researchers and teachers have provided instruction to how to use more relevant and more powerful learning strategies. Thus, being able to use the best strategies out of a carefully cultivated range does not always come by it self but learners need guidance on how to learn.

Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) state that if learning how to learn is introduced into the curriculum late, it can prove too late to be effective because learners would have already worked out for themselves the habits which they prefer. He adds that if learning to learn is to be achieved, the basic patterns should be laid down in early adolescence or perhaps earlier (1986, p. 94). The statements clearly explain why some of our learners fail to benefit from learning how to learn instructions. Learners can resist change of their old learning habits and beliefs. For example, the belief that knowledge can be simply given by the teacher while they are just passive. It is the role of the teachers to make it clear that the goal of strategy instruction is to supplant strategies that do not work and encourage those that work. For example, discouraging rote memorization and encouraging practice and reviewing their work.

According to McKeachy (1988), there is needed to train our learners how to study which is a meta-cognitive strategy. There are individual differences in the way learners study and it has been demonstrated that these differences in the study strategies are related to differences in achievement. " 'A' learners study in ways different from those of 'C' and 'D' learners," (McKeachy, 1988, p.3). The study does not clearly describe in detail how the 'A' learners study so that the 'C' and 'D' learners can be taught. Obviously they can be taught to be organized and avoid procrastination in fulfilling schedules.

2.8 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the social constructivist theory by Levy Vygotsky [1896-1934] (1962). Within constructivism, the study also followed the information processing model

2.8.1 Constructivism

The term constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves. Each learner individually and socially constructs meaning, as he or she learns (Vygotsky, 1962). Constructing meaning is learning. Learning therefore implies the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. Vygotsky's theory of learning states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, logical memory and to the formation of concepts. The theory rests on two key assumptions that learning occurs in a social grouping and that those who are more knowledgeable tended to help the less knowledgeable ones to become knowledgeable through the scaffolding process. Miller (2003) adds that learners working in teams under the guidance of the teacher will, according to this view, more easily discover and comprehend difficult concepts if they can talk to each other about the problems. Vygotsky insisted on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge.

The most significant bases of social constructivist theory were laid by Vygotsky (1962) in his theory of the "Zone of proximal development" (ZPD). "Proximal" simply means "next". He observed that when children were tested on tasks on their own, they rarely did as well as when they were working in collaboration with an adult (Vygotsky, 1962). When learning English, there is need for teachers to set up cooperative learning

arrangements among groups of learners with different levels of ability in order to make the low performers discover from the high performers.

However, some cognitive scientists and other educators like Mayer (2004), question the effectiveness of constructivism towards instructional design. He argues that little empirical evidence exists to support "learning by doing" given novice learners. Mayer further argues that novices do not possess the underlying mental model or schemas necessary for pure discovery learning where as learners discover for themselves. Hence, guided discovery is recommended (Mayer, 2004). In addition, he also argues on constructivism's insisting of change of control from the teacher to the learner.

Educational psychologists with their foundations in behavioral psychology have sought to design programs in such a way that learners would be enticed to achieve specified objectives. Constructivists have said that this violates both what we know now and the nature of knowledge. They have claimed that objectives should be negotiated with learners based on their felt needs, which programmed activities should emerge from within the contexts of their livedworlds.

2.8.2 The Information Processing Model (IPM)

Within constructivism, the information processing model developed by Miller (1956) explains better about language learning and strategies. According to this model, learning strategies means to know what to learn, how to learn and to form and direct one's own learning (Miller, 2003). Learning strategies are known as individual methods that aim to

increase the information process quality of learners and include mental operations that can be used by learners and be taught by teachers. According to Miller (1956), the main factors of this theory are about perception, thinking, learning, memory, attention, creativity and reasoning. Ozel (2009) stipulates that in the Information Processing model, the focal point is the individual and his living space. The individual's bio genetic potential, his mind of habit prone to develop his potential and his social interaction field are identifiers of both his learning and his learning forms.

The Information processing model that is meaningful according to an individual in this context looks for answers to the following four questions: *How is new information taken from outside? How is the new information processed? How is information stored in the long term memory? How is the stored information recalled?*

This process is a mental process that includes information storage and cognitive activities that provides the transferring of the information between memories. These are the sensory register composed of sensory organs like eyes and ears through which we receive information about our surroundings; the working memory or short term memory where information is temporarily held so that it may be discarded or transferred to the long term memory. The model likens the thinking process to how a computer works. The human mind takes in information, organises and stores it to be retrieved at a later time. These ways are determined with the formation coding and organisations in a certain directory in short term memory in order to store information in long term memory. According to Ozel (2009), at this point individual learning strategies that will create meaningful learning forms appear. These processes that simplify the learning of the learners and directly

shape their learning activities are key mental forms that are routines of learners. In humans, the results of IPM are exhibited through behaviour or actions- facial expression, a reply to a question or movement.

2.8.3 Application of Vygotsky's Theory on language learning strategies

Firstly, the social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1962) emphasizes social interaction as important in the development of competence during learning. This being the case teachers must encourage social interaction to maximise competence in all the four language skills. Language learning strategies fulfil this interaction under social and affective strategies. The learner uses social strategies when he interacts with the knowledgeable like the teacher and peers in pairs or groups. The learner interacts to ask questions; cooperates with others and develops empathy with others. In order to manage social activities and become motivated, learners also need affective strategies like lowering their anxiety, encouraging themselves and taking their emotional temperature.

Secondly, the theory stresses on assisting learners to learn in order to improve their competence. In Vygotsky's theory, this is called 'the Zone of Proximal Development.' Through working in teams under the guidance of the teachers, learners will more easily discover and comprehend difficult concepts if they can talk with each other about the problems. In relation to this notion, literature on second language learning states that language learning strategies can be taught in order to help learners develop competence (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Learners are supposed to be guided and assisted to refine the strategies that they already know and be trained in those they are not aware of. They are

also supposed to be monitored to check if the training has improved how they learn and their competence. Thirdly, the theory views learning as an active process and insist on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge individually and socially during learning. This indicates that the road to knowledge is always under construction. For the learner to be competent in language learning, there is need for the individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just to memorise the right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning. The theory views learning as an active process with active practice and review that leads to the greatest retention of knowledge. One of the general characteristics of constructivism is encouragement and acceptance of the learner's autonomy and initiative (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p.103). This view is related to the study of LLS in that it also aims at achieving an autonomous learner (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.8). Autonomy can be enhanced through being active to use memory strategies to remember, cognitive strategies to think, practice and construct knowledge, compensation strategies to guess intelligently and overcome limitations when practising the target language. Learners also become active and autonomous when they apply meta-cognitive strategies to plan, monitor and problem-solve and evaluate their knowledge construction while learning.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter has reviewed related literature from different authors. It has discussed the English learning situation in Malawi, the definition and classification of language learning strategies and the motivation for using them, factors that affect LLS choice and how the learners' use of different LLS affects their performance. Finally, it has discussed

the constructivist theory mainly from the Information Processing Model perspective. The next chapter discusses the research methodology used to come up with the findings.

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the research design and the data collection methods that were used to conduct the study. It also discusses how respondents were selected and ways in which the data collected was analysed. Ethical considerations taken are also presented.

3.1 Research design

The study was mainly guided by a qualitative approach. However, quantitative approach was slightly used to interpret some data in figures where necessary. Qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences and attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants (Dawson, 2002). Frankiel and Wallen (2008) state that qualitative data is detailed with thick description, inquiry in-depth, direct quotations capturing people's perspectives and experiences. The study mostly employed a qualitative research approach because it was exploratory in nature and that issues under investigation demanded prolonged engagement with respondents so as to understand their experiences. It aimed at learning some facets of the world in detail.

Within the qualitative approach, the study used a phenomenological design. Patton (2002) stipulates that a phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of

MALAWI COLLECTION

what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. In phenomenology, the researcher hopes to gain some insight into the world of his or her participants and to describe their perceptions and reactions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Phenomenologist believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality and reality is consequently socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1988). This approach was chosen because of the nature of the study. The researcher wanted to carefully and thoroughly capture and describe how the strategies learners used affected their performance in English. The study endeavored to provide a thick description of the situation at the identified secondary schools so that the findings might have the potential of applicability in other settings.

3.2 Selection of study site

The study was conducted in the city of Zomba which falls under the South East Education Division (SEED) in the Ministry of Education of Malawi. Zomba City was selected because it was closer to the researcher's home in which case the schools were easily accessible. This made the research to be conducted without much economic stress. Creswell (2003) concurs by stating that studying one's backyard provides easy access to informants and information at a minimal cost.

3.3 Sample population

Within Zomba Urban, four secondary schools were purposefully selected in terms of resource availability, day and boarding, sex composition, among others. This concurs

with Merriam (1998) who stipulates that purposeful sampling entails the selection of a sample from which one can learn the most to gain understanding and insight. Two of the secondary schools were boarding schools while the other two were community day secondary schools (CDSSs). These two different types of secondary schools were chosen in order to have the correct information about the language learning strategies used by Zomba urban learners.

3.4 Data sources and sampling procedure

Data was collected from teachers of English teaching in form three and form three learners. In total, the study involved eight teachers and ninty six learners. This means the overall sample was one hundred and four. The sample was purposefully selected. Form three teachers were selected because they would have more to say about the form three learners than teachers from other classes. Teachers were required to assist in the selection of above and below average learners. The study selected below and above average learners basing on their teachers' recommendations and with reference to their progress reports in English starting from form one. (Refer sample in Appendix 6). Those who scored 65% and above in every test were rated as above average learners and those who scored below 40% were rated as below average learners. These teachers were also included in order for the researcher to have different sources of information on the strategies their learners used and how they affected their performance. In addition, one form three class per school was selected. Two schools had three streams for form three while the remaining two schools had one stream. Random sampling selection was employed in the schools with more than one stream. The form three classes were selected

because they were more experienced to secondary school survival than the form ones and that they were not examination classes. At the time of the study, other classes were busy preparing for examinations and involving them in such a study could have been difficult as they would be less interested.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection took a period of two and half months. It was conducted in the second and third term of the 2010 school calendar. It started on 7 July 2010 up to 3 October 2010 with a break of two weeks during the end of second term holidays. The methods of data collection were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and class observations.

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

The interview method was chosen because, "an interview is a useful way to get a large amount of data quickly," (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.108). Within the one form three class selected at each school, eight learners were interviewed individually. Four best learners and four below average learners were involved. These learners were selected purposefully by the researcher based on their progress reports (see sample on appendix 6) and with help from their teachers. This gave a total sample of thirty two learners and eight teachers to be interviewed individually making a total of forty interviewees. The results were recorded in a diary. However, Bell (1993) states that interviews are highly subjective techniques and therefore there is the danger of bias. This is why a variety of methods were used for triangulation purposes.

3.5.2 Focus group discussions

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 324) define a focus group interview as a group interview where a moderator seeks to focus the group discussion on specific themes of research interest. These may be called discussion groups or group interviews. Focus groups discussions were used inorder to make participants offer additional comments beyond what they originally had to say once they hear the other responses (Frankiel & Wallen, 2009). However, in focus groups, some people may be uncomfortable in a group setting and nervous about speaking in front of others. Not everyone can contribute and other people may contaminate an individual's views (Dawson, 2002, p. 29). To overcome this in this study, learners were advised to respect each other's views.

Within form three classes selected at each school, the study used two focus groups per school making a total of eight focus groups of eight learners each. In total, the focus groups involved a sample of 64 learners. Each focus group consisted of four above average learners, and four below average learners. The results were audio tape recorded and later transcribed. In both interviews and focus group discussions, the issue of gender was considered. The sample comprised both male and female learners in order to compare how they used different language learning strategies.

3.5.3 Class observations

According to Wisker (2008), observation is a way of gathering data by watching behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting. Observation enables the researcher to capture what people actually do rather than what they say they

do (p.203). The total sample of one hundred and four was also observed. In order to follow research ethics, the observation was overt. That is to say everyone knew that he or she was being observed. The justification for choosing this method is that observational data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. However, people behave differently when they know that they are being observed ending up making the results biased. In this study, this was overcome by piloting the instruments and the repetition of the process. Each class was observed for four times. Every observation took one class period of about forty minutes. This gave a total of four class periods to be observed per school and a total of sixteen observations throughout the study.

3.6 Data management and analysis

Data analysis began as soon data collection started. It was an ongoing process which was carried out along side data collection (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As suggested by Arher et al. (2007), data collection and data analysis are parallel activities in qualitative research. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious and overwhelming in terms of the large volume of the material that needs to be processed. The analysis began by cleaning the data to make it clear and well understood. It was read over and over and there were comparisons between data from learners and teachers' interviews and observations. All these steps helped to identify themes and categories. The data was then finally analyzed according to the theoretical framework and the main research questions.

3.7 Piloting of the study

Before the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted at Masongola secondary school within Zomba urban. This was to find out if the planned time line was feasible and whether or not the interview questions and the observation schedule were appropriate and effective (Dawson, 2002). It was revealed from the pilot study that some questions were ambiguous and participants were not comfortable with some English words. For example, learners and some teachers could not understand the word "strategies." The questions were then adjusted and rephrased in preparation for the actual research in order for participants to come out with the required results.

3.8 Access negotiations

Prior to the commencement of the data collection process, the researcher sought for a letter of introduction from the Department of Education Foundations at Chancellor College. The letter was attached to the letters from Ministry of Education and the Division Manager for the South East Education Division (SEED). These permission letters were used when asking for permission to collect data in the selected secondary schools. This is in line with Bell (1993), who states that permission to carry out an investigation must be sought at an early stage. "As soon as you have an agreed project outline and have read enough to convince yourself that the topic is feasible, it is advisable to make a formal written approach to the organizations and individuals concerned outlining your plans,"(Bell,1993, p.47). Copies of letters of permission were also sent to all head teachers of the selected schools and in addition, verbal permission was sought from teachers and learners.

3.9 Ethical issues

Ethical standards were maintained all the time. There was informed consent which Diener and Crandal (1978) define as the procedures in which individuals choose whether or not to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would likely to influence their decisions. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study in advance so as to gain informed consent. Respondents were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study.

3.10 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participants were assured of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the information they were to provide. For anonymity sake, participants were assured that there would be no names recorded but instead letter codes would be used for each respondent. Furthermore, the four schools were given fictitious names as Aliko, Bomba, Chombo and Dowe. This concurs with Borg and Gall (1989) who stipulates that confidentiality must be further protected by not using names of individuals in any publications that result from a research project. They were also assured that the information obtained would be kept confidential and sorely for academic purposes.

3.11 Enhancing credibility and authenticity of the study

To ensure credibility and authenticity of the study, the researcher made use of critical friends at various stages of the study such as proposal writing, instrumentation and findings. Triangulation of methods and sites also helped to enhance reliability and validity. This included the application of different methods like interviews, focus groups,

and observation. Triangulation was also applied by involving different schools, classes and teachers. The researcher is a teacher in South East Education Division and made sure that this would not affect the study negatively by applying phenomenological suspension or bracketing. This was in line with Silverman (2005) who states that the researcher brackets his or her experience with the phenomenon by explaining his or her experiences with and positions on the phenomenon. Direct quotations from respondents were also used to show the authenticity of the study.

3.12 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed the methodological framework that was used in the study. The general approach and data collection methods and how the data was analysed have been included in the chapter. Furthermore, ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study which are pertinent when doing research have been highlighted as well. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to each research question. The purpose of this study was to find out the language learning strategies learners used in English and how these were reflected in their performance. Performance in this study meant the ability of the learner to do well in class exercises, tests and examinations. The strong or weak relationship between language learning strategies and performance was found through comparing above average and below average learners and the language learning strategies they used. As discussed in Chapter 3, learners were classified based on continuous assessment and their end of term tests as below average (below 40%) and above average (65% and above). This chapter is divided into six sections. The first five sections present and discuss findings on each of the five language learning strategies learners were using and how they related with performance. These are cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies. The chapter ends with a summary of key issues.

4.1 Cognitive strategies used by secondary school English learners

The study found that learners used cognitive strategies. They used their mental processes to analyze, remember and synthesise language issues. They were also able to solve language problems and transferred what they learnt to new situations. Some cognitive

language learning strategies were found to be related to performance while others were not. Table 1 shows a summary of the cognitive strategies used by learners.

Table 1: Cognitive strategies used by learners

Cognitive strategies Used	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Practice	43	24
Creating structure for input and output	43	15
Memory	33	30

Out of Oxford's (1990) typology, learners used cognitive language learning strategies of practising, creating structure for input and output and memory. In all the types of cognitive strategies, the number of below average learners who used these strategies was low compared to the above average learners who used them highly. This concurs with Jurkovic, (2008) who found that learners at higher levels of language competence use cognitive strategies more often.

According to Table 1, creating structure for input and output as cognitive strategies were the lowest used by the below average learners. Only 15 out of 48 below average learners used them. The use of cognitive strategies by the below average learners was higher under memorization where 30 below average learners used it. This is because many scored highly under rote memorization as a set of cognitive strategies. The researcher suggests that this could be the reason why such learners were only able to reproduce the class work without understanding. Rote memorization only assisted them to answer the

low order questions resulting into poor performance. The relationship between cognitive sub-strategies and their sets and performance have been discussed further, in the following sections.

4.1.1 Practising strategies

Practice in this case simply means learning by doing the four language skills regularly. With reference to Table 1, more above average learners frequently used practice than the below average learners. That is, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 42 above average and 24 below average learners reported that they practised the English four language skills. Learners were also observed practising the target language. Teachers reported that the inadequate practice by the below average learners was because they were deficient in their knowledge of English which made them inactive in the classroom. Out of the 8 teachers interviewed, 2 reported that some learners were not active because of their beliefs about learning. Learners and mostly the below average had the belief that in the classroom the teacher should be the one dominating and explaining and not leaving them to learn on their own. Asking a below average learner why he was not active in a group, he explained:

> *Ndinabwera kudzaphunzira chifukwa ndine wosadziwa. Pa chifukwa chimenechi sindingathe kuyankha mafunso ndi kuchita zinthu ndekha popanda kuyamba kuphunzitsidwa. Aphunzitsi athu amakonda kutifunsa kuti tikambirane mafunso ovuta asanayambe ndi kuphunzitsa komwe.* (I came to school to learn because I don't know and that is why I cannot find out answers on my own without being taught. Our teacher is fond of asking us to discuss difficult questions before teaching). (Focus group1, Chombo CDSS, 17/08/2010)

The above statements indicate that such learners have a negative attitude with participatory learning. Such being the case they need to be sensitized that practice is the best way to learn a language. Furthermore, interviewing teachers and learners, it was revealed that learners who practiced the four language skills more frequently also performed highly. Commenting on the importance of practice, one teacher explained:

> Practice enhances good performance because learners remember more what they do themselves than what they see and hear. If you observed correctly, most of the learners who performed poorly were those who were not active during practice time, spoke Chichewa in the groups, were writing notes from other subjects while their friends were doing different tasks and in the end they just copied what was discussed and the exercises from friends for marking. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 7/09/2010)

The above statement suggests that the above average learners performed highly because of their efforts to practice in the four language skills. Commenting on practice as a learning strategy, one above average learner said:

> *Ndimayesetsa kuchita chirichonse chimene aphunzitsi atiuza kuti tichite mozipereka, ndi mtima wonse, pandekha kapena mmagulu. Ndimachita practice kuyankhula kumvetsera ndi kulemba mkalasi ndi kunja komwe kuti ndidziwe chingerezi.* (I make sure that I put all my efforts on whatever we are asked to do by the teacher be it in groups or individually. I practice speaking, listening, writing and reading in and outside classroom in order to know English). (Learner 2, Aliko Secondary School, 14/09/2010)

This indicated that practice enhanced performance in the above average learners. This was unlike the below average learners who believed that they would learn only by the teacher predominantly telling them. The findings about the practice of English using the four language skills have further been discussed in Table 2 and the following sections.

Table 2: Practice as a cognitive strategy

Below average Learners out of 48	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Speaking and listening practice	43	18
Writing practice	42	30
Reading practice	44	24

With reference to Table 2, learners used the sub cognitive strategy of practice in speaking, writing, reading and listening. In all the sub-strategies, the study noted differences between the uses of practice strategies. The number of above average learners who used them was very high compared to those below average and the reasons have been given according to each set of strategies. The lowest strategy used by the below average learners was speaking. Only 18 learners out of 48 practiced speaking. The study found a strong relationship between each practising set and performance. These have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

4.1.1.1 Practice in listening and speaking

Through observation and interviews, the study found that learners used the listening and speaking practice strategy. From Table 2, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 43 above average and 18 below average learners used listening and speeking practice as a learning strategy. This shows that the above average learners practiced speaking more frequently than the below average learners. Many below average learners could not get involved in practice. Teachers reported it was because they lacked the capacity to

participate with their limited knowledge of English. The study found that the above average learners practised by speaking to their teachers and peers without being ashamed of their mistakes. One teacher commented on his school's encouragement of the practice strategy saying:

> Learners are encouraged to practise speaking English because at our school, we have a motto which says *defective but effective communication.* This means we insist that learners should speak only English and through mistakes learners will end up being good English speakers. (Teacher 1, Bomba secondary school, 9/09/2010)

The above comments confirm that practice is a very important strategy which can enhance performance in learning. Learners reported that they practised speaking English with friends and teachers in order to be fluent. It was also reported by Aliko and Bomba teachers that debating clubs also helped learners to practise and improve their English speaking. Commenting on the importance of speaking practice, an above average learner explained:

> Practice makes perfect, *munthu umaphunzira chilankhulo pochiyankhula mopanda manyazi kuti usekedwa. Umaphunzira pa zolakwitsa zakozo*. (You learn a language by practising using it without being ashamed of being laughed at. You learn through mistakes). (Learner 4, Aliko secondary school, 07/08/2010)

However, it was also observed and reported that learners and teachers in two schools out of four were not taking speaking practice seriously. Teachers spoke Chichewa to their learners and when teaching, some code-switched to translate. This agrees with Oxford (1990) who found that most of the language teachers did not view communication as a

priority and the few who cared about communication knew little or nothing about how to help their learners to communicate. Asking them why they translated, a teacher said:

> Some of our learners are dull and we speak Chichewa for them to grasp what we are teaching them. (Teacher 2, Dowe CDSS, 17/08/2010)

The above statement shows how some teachers failed to be role models on speaking practice. This negatively affected learners' performance leading to failure to speak English by many learners. It was observed that because of such poor role models, some below average learners used the practice strategy but the quality of the strategy use was low. There was too much of literal translation from Chichewa and code-switching. For example, during a reading comprehension lesson, one below average learner talking about a man who misappropriated funds from his company said:

"*The man ate a lot of money.*"(Observation, Bomba secondary school, 27/07/2010)

This literal translation from Chichewa to English shows the declining standards of English proficiency by many learners because of lack of practice. This result indicates that teachers are to blame for not reinforcing the English speaking rule.

In all the four schools, learners and teachers reported that classroom practice was minimal. They said it was because the English syllabus was loaded; large classes; national examination system which does not examine speaking and listening and teachers' teaching styles which hindered learners from practising. These affected the performance of the learners. Furthermore, it was found that the English speaking rule in 2 out of 4 schools was just on paper. Learners spoke Chichewa in their class groups and

even outside. Asking why they did not practise speaking, learners reported that they liked learning what was examinable in the national examinations and speaking was not part of it. One of the below average learners argued:

> *English ili ndi zinthu zambiri zoti tiphunzire kuti tikhonze mayeso. Chofunika kwambiri ndi* certificate. *Ndimadana ndi kutaya nthawi yambiri ndi kuphunzira zinthu zosafunsa pa mayeso monga kuyankhula chizungu ndi* debate. *(*The English language syllabus is loaded and there are a lot of things to cover in order for us to pass examinations. What is important is obtaining a certificate. I hate wasting more time on things which are not examinable like speaking and debate). (Chombo CDSS, 7/08/2010)

This statement proves that examinations hindered learners from English speaking practice leading to lack of fluency. The study found a strong relationship between speaking practice and performance. All the eight teachers concurred that speaking practice improved performance. The statements reveal that only few secondary schools encourage listening and speaking practice on their learners and force their learners to interact in English. In many schools learners practise in speaking and listening becomes minimal because the learners do not have role models. It could also be because teachers fail to speak in English to their learners and during lessons in two schools, code-switching was common. The other reason for lack of practice in listening and speaking by learners could be that teachers always do not have enough time to finish the syllabus. For example, during every third term, lessons for the form threes are affected during national examination periods when many teachers go for invigilation and marking and also many schools do not have enough classrooms to teach while examinations are in progress. To prepare their learners for examinations, teachers ignore listening and speaking lessons and concentrate on grammar and writing. They also make their lessons more of teacher

centred in order to teach many things within a short time. This hinders the learners from practice. Because of the idea that what is important is passing examinations, some learners also react or become less involved when a teacher spends more time on teaching listening and speaking skills which are not examined.

4.1.1.2 Practice in English writing

The study found that learners used writing practice as a learning strategy. With reference to Table 2, 42 above and 30 below average learners practiced writing. The results show variations between the two groups of learners. The above average learners still used this strategy highly. Commenting on the writing of exercises, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndimayesetsa kulemba* exercise *iri yonse yomwe tapatsidwa ndi aphunzitsi. Izi zimathandiza kudziwa ngatidi tamva kapena ayi ndipo timachita* correction *pa zomwe talakwa. Ndimayesetsa kuchita* practice *kalembedwe ka* composition *pa ma* topic *osiyana siyana tikaweluka ndi kukapereka kwa aphunzitsi kuti achite* mark *ndi kundithandiza.* Practice *imandithandiza kukhoza kwambiri ma* composition. (I make sure I write all the exercises given by the teacher. This helps me to judge if I have learnt the material or not and I make corrections on the questions which I get wrong. I try to practice writing compositions after classes and I give them to the teacher for marking and assistance. This helps me to perform highly on compositions). (Aliko secondary school, 24/09/2010)

The quotation shows that the above average learners were very active and committed to learning the writing skill. The above average learners also always led in class assignments. For example, in group compositions at Chombo, the above average learners dominated. They were the ones elected to be group leaders and secretaries. Some below average learners were seen copying notes for other subjects and others were quiet. The

differences between the above and below average could be because in schools with large classes like Chombo and Dowe, there was little following up to check if all learners handed in their work. This resulted in many below average learners not writing the assignments which they usually found difficult. One language teacher explained that it was because getting few assignments from learners eased their marking. Another teacher also reported that due to large classes some teachers were not checking if all learners handed in their assignments. To ease their work, they also minimised the number of exercises and questions. This promoted lack of writing practice by the learners. Commenting on limited exercises, a teacher said:

> With the problem of large classes, we try to minimize exercises and the number of questions to reduce the marking load. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 9/09/2010)

The above comment suggests that in schools with large classes, writing practice was minimal. Teachers preferred learners to do exercises orally to writing or just asked them to answer few questions in writing. Learners at Dowe reported that some teachers marked the exercises late and others did not give feedback after tests indicating that they did not mark. This discouraged some learners from practising writing. This agrees with Kyriacou (1998) who states that the way in which learners' work is marked, recorded and reported has an impact on learners' subsequent motivation. However, according to Table 2, out of all the practice strategies it showed that below average learners scored highly on writing practice. It was suggested that it could be because writing all exercises from the teacher was compulsory in most of the secondary schools. Learners were observed being sent out because of not writing assignments at Aliko secondary school. The study revealed that

the below average learners were not contributing much during group writing assignments. Such learners read books from other subjects; others refused the writing responsibility in the group because they could not write correctly. Observation also showed that the high performers finished earlier and went for marking. The low performers handed in their work late. Asked why they handed in their class work late, one below average learner explained:

> *Timadikira ozidziwawo alembe kaye kenaka nafe tilembe.* (We wait for those who know the answers to write first so that we can copy from them). (Learner 8, Dowe CDSS 7/9/2010)

In the congested classrooms, the study revealed that more than 90% of the below average learners got the entire exercise questions correct because of copying from each other. This shows they did not practise the class work adequately and this led to lack of retrieval and application during tests ending up failing. The study found a strong relationship between writing practice and performance. The English writing skill was important because it was examined. Teachers encouraged it by forming writing clubs but it was always the above average learners that joined them to practise meaningful writing. The above average learners that practiced writing performed highly. This shows that learners practised writing and the above average learners who were more knowledgeable assisted the below average to perform well in the classroom. This is in line with constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1962) concerning the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where the less knowledgeable learners perform better when assisted than doing the activities on their own. The statements from teachers above also indicate that learners' practice in writing especially in compositions sometimes does not receive feedback, learners who do

MALAWI COLLECTION

not write exercises are rarely followed up and that teachers give limited exercises to reduce their marking load. The findings present the opposite of what teachers are expected of professionally. Generally teachers are supposed to be hard working and committed. This negligence of their duties affects learners' performance.

4.1.1.3 Practice in English reading and performance

The study found that learners used practice in English reading as a language learning strategy. With reference to Table 2 above, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 44 above and 24 below average learners used this strategy. This reveals that the above average learners practiced highly because of motivation and higher knowledge of English. The below average were not practising much because they had language difficulties and lacked motivation.They did not like reading practice because of failing to apply intelligent guessing and had limited vocabulary. They were not taking reading lessons seriously. For example, observing a lesson at Dowe, the below average learners joined groups slowly and others did not even bother to go where the books were. Others sat on the opposite side of the books making them to read words upside down. This made learners fail to comprehend the passage. Commenting why they did not take reading seriously, a below average learner said:

> *Mabuku omwe timawerenga ndi ovuta ndipo aphunzitsi athu sadziwa kuphunzitsa. Koma amatiumirizidwa kuchita* practise *kuwerenga pa zomwe sitingamvetse patokha. (*The books we read have difficult passages, the teacher does not know how to teach but we are forced to practice what we do not understand on our own). (Dowe secondary school, 17/08/2010)

The above statement shows lack of motivation by the below average learners to apply practice strategies of reading and listening. These learners explained that the teacher did not know how to teach because she used learner-centred teaching which they found difficult because they did not like doing things by themselves. Four teachers suggested that the lack of practice in reading by some below average learners could also be because of the quality of learners selected to their schools who did not pass well in their national examinations and others who just found places after failing the examinations. During a reading lesson, differences in behaviour between the above and below average learners were also noted. The below average learners were not active while the successful ones were active and read seriously. They guessed intelligently about the story and answered pre-reading questions very well. Learners reported that they practised reading by utilizing their school libraries. They read novels, short stories and magazines. Commenting on reading, one above average learners said:

> *Kuwerenga ndi kumvetsa nkhani ndikofunika* practice *chifukwa comprehension imabwera pa mayeso. Kuwerenga kumatithandizanso kudziwa mawu atsopano achizungu amene tingagwiritse ntchito polemba kapena kumva ndi kulankhula. Masiku ano* literature *inasakanizidwa ndi language ndiye timayenera kuwerenga kwambiri kuti titsirize mabukuwa ndi kuwamvetsa. Kuwerenga kumatithandiza kukhoza bwino pa mayeso.* (Reading practice is important because comprehension is examinable. It also helps us to widen our knowledge of vocabulary which can be applied in the other skills like speaking and writing. With the combination of English language and literature, we are forced to read seriously in order to finish and understand the novels. Reading helps us to perform well in examinations). (Learner 4, Bomba secondary school, 11/09/2010)

The statements by this above average learner show that they were very committed to reading in order to perform well during examinations. This led to their success.

Asking teachers on how learners used reading as a LLS one of them explained:

> Reading is very important to the learners' success. The language subject was merged with literature and without serious reading learners cannot analyse the books. The above average read seriously all the time while the below average panic to memorise in the last minute. This leads to their failure. (Chombo secondary school 23/09/2010)

The above quotation shows that examination influenced learners to read seriously. The study found a strong relationship between reading practice and performance. Reading for comprehension is examined in the national examinations and the above average students that were observed practising it seriously in the classroom performed highly. In summary of practice, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of practice using the four language skills. The study found a strong relationship between practice and performance. The above average learners were successful because they practiced what they learnt. The lack of adequate practice in the four language skills made the below average learners perform poorly and score less than half despite other factors.

4.1.2 Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy

Creating structure for input and output is the making and arranging for both comprehension and production of the target language (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table .1 on page 48, 43 above average and 15 below average learners used this strategy. The figures indicate that more above average learners used this strategy than the below average ones. Under this sub-cognitive strategy, learners used two sets of sub-strategies

which were note taking and summary and highlighting. These have further been explained in Table 3 and the sections following.

Table 3: Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy

Creating structure for input and output strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Note-taking and summary	31	5
Highlighting	28	25

With reference to Table 3 above, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of creating a structure for input and output. Under this sub-strategy, learners used note-taking and summary and highlighting as cognitive sub-strategy sets. The number of above average learners who used all these sets of strategies was much higher compared to those who were below average. The reasons for the high and low use of these strategies have been explained according to each set. As indicated in Table 3, the study found a strong relationship between note-taking and summary and performance. A weak relationship was found between highlighting and performance. These have been discussed in detail in the following sub-section

4.1.2.1 Note-taking and summary

Observation and interviews revealed that 31 above average learners and only 5 below average learners used the strategy of note-making and summary. This shows the above average learners led in the use of this strategy. This could be because they were focused in their learning. The below average learners hardly used these strategies. The study

found that it was because of their deficiency in the English language and inadequate use of their mental processes. The above average ones used note taking and summary and the following statement asserts the use of note-taking and summary.

> Taking notes and summarizing what the teachers say make me pay attention and have a record of what was said in class. I also know what was not covered in class. (Focus group, Chombo secondary school, 20/09/2010).

In order to create a structure for the input and output, learners took notes involving their mental processes to write down the specific points when given a passage or listening to it orally. The above average learners took notes on what they heard and read. They were also good at summarizing long passages compared to the below average learners. Note-making and summarizing were examinable during national examinations and this forced them to learn this strategy although the below average learners still failed. As evidence of this, a below average learner explained:

> *Ine sinditha kuchita zinthu ziwiri nthawi imodzi monga kumvetsera ndi kulemba. Nthawi zonse ndimalephera* note-taking *ndi* summary *pa mayeso chifukwa sindizimvetsa kalembedwe kache.* (I fail to do two things at a time listening to the teacher and taking notes. I fail note taking and summary during tests because I don't understand how to do them). (Dowe CDSS, learner 4, 24/09/2010)

The statement above revealed that the below average learners used note-taking and summary strategies miserably and incorrectly leading to their failure.

Commenting on the relationship between note-taking and summary and performance, a teacher said:

> Note-taking and summarizing are advanced strategies. Although they are taught, only the above average learners know how to use them resulting in high performance. Many below average students fail because they can hardly spell out words on their own (Teacher 2 Bomba secondary school, 24/09/2010)

The study revealed a strong relationship between note-making and summary and performance. The two skills were examinable and failure to understand them led to examination failure hence poor performance. Learners who used the strategy were highly successful. From these sentiments, the above average learners used their mental processes more than the below average whose thinking capacity seemed weak to process information. Relating to the information processing model, the above average learners were successful because their minds took in the information and organised it to be retrieved at a later time. A number of the below average learners received the information incorrectly. Due to their limited knowledge of English, they failed to organise and summarize it. They could not store what their teachers and books taught them on how to make notes and summaries. This led to lack of retrieval resulting into failure.

4.1.2.2 Highlighting

With reference to Table 3, observation and interviews also showed that 28 above average and 25 below average learners out of 96 highlighted important information and main points in their exercise books. This shows that the above average learners slightly used the highlighting strategy more highly than the below average learners. This could be because of their commitment to learning. Compared to the other strategies for creating a

structure for the input and output, the below average performed highly on this strategy. This was because highlighting was easy and did not require a lot of thinking. The researcher's observation revealed that in all the schools 53 out of 96 learners had red, black, blue and green pens and pencils for writing and highlighting. Learners also bolded the main points with the same colour or a different one. The red pen was also used to highlight main points in the teachers' notes, passages during examinations and in their personal books. When they were asked why they highlighted, one of the above average learners said:

> *Kukongoletsa ndi kuwalitsa mitu ya notes kumathandiza kuti tizichita study mosavuta. Zimatithandizanso kuwerenga ma* main points *mwachangu ndi kuyesa kukumbukira ma* sub points. *Sitivutikanso tikamafuna* information *mofulumira. (*Highlighting main points makes our studying easy. It also helps us to read a point quickly and try to remember the sub points and search for information easily). (Focus group 2, Dowe secondary school, 12/08/2010)

Asking a below average learner why highlighting was important, she said:

> *Kuwalitsa kumathandiza* notes *zanga kukhala zokongola ndikusangalatsa poziona (*Highlighting helps to make my notes beautiful to look at). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 12/08/2010)

From the above comments, learners used highlighting for different purposes. The above average learners used it mainly to assist them when studying while this below average learner mainly used them for beauty. Out of 8 teachers, 5 reported that highlighting as a strategy had a weak relationship with performance. Learners highlighted but others could not apply other strategies like reviewing seriously to enhance their performance. It was reported that the below average learners who also used this strategy mainly used it for the

decoration of their exercise books. Some were found doing it while lessons were in progress. This sometimes hindered them from using other strategies. Commenting on highlighting and performance relationship, a teacher explained:

> Highlighting does not enhance high performance because there are some above average learners who just write their notes neatly without highlighting but perform very well. Highlighting is an easy strategy which can work depending on the individual and only if combined with other strategies. The below average just get interested to highlight and hardly use the notes. Others highlight during lessons instead of listening to the teacher. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 7/09/2010)

The above quotations indicate that highlighting as a cognitive set was one of the strategies which the below average learners used most but still performed poorly. This shows that highlighting on its own without other manipulative skills does not enhance performance. It was revealed that the above average learners combined highlighting with other manipulative language learning strategies in order to succeed. In summary, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of creating a structure for input and output which consisted of the cognitive sets of note-making and summary and highlighting. The study revealed a strong relationship between note-making and summary and performance. A weak relationship was revealed between highlighting and performance.

4.1.3 Memorization

With reference to Table 1 on page 48, out of the 96 learners interviewed, 33 above average and 30 below average learners used memorization as a cognitive strategy. Differences were noted between the below and above average learners in their choice of memory strategies which resulted into the success of the above average and the failure of

the below average. Learners reported that memory helped them to be able to understand the spoken and written language and to produce it in speaking and writing. In support of this, a teacher explained:

> Without memory, there cannot be achievement because there cannot be retrieval of what learners learn in order to pass examinations. (Teacher 1, Dowe CDSS 15/09/2010)

The memory strategies which learners used have further been clarified in Table 4.

Table 4: Memorization as a sub-cognitive strategy

Memory strategies	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Rote memorization	19	44
Reviewing work done	47	16

Based on Table 4, learners used memory strategies of rote memorization and reviewing work done in order to remember what they learnt. The below average learners used rote memorization more highly than the above average ones and the above average learners greatly used reviewing of the work done as a memory strategy. The study found a weak relationship between rote memorization and performance because those who used it very highly performed poorly. They failed tests miserably if the same questions were twisted a bit because they lacked the capacity to reason and understand the material. There was a strong relationship between reviewing work done and performance. Learners who reviewed their work seriously remembered and understood what was learnt resulting in

meaningful learning. The memory strategies learners used are further discussed in the sections below.

4.1.3.1 Rote memorization

Rote memorization as a strategy was reported by learners and teachers but it was not found in the different authors' typology. With reference to Table 4, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 19 above average and 44 below average learners used rote memorization. The study found that this cognitive set was highly used by the below average learners. The high degree of use especially by the below average was because learners were learning with an aim to pass examinations rather than to know English. The study found that rote memorization mostly without understanding was common among below average learners.The following excerpt from a below average learner shows why below average learners relied much on rote memorization.

> *Tikamalephera kukumbukira zomwe tikuwerenga ndiponso zotivuta mwachitsanzo ma* preposition *ndi* order of adjectives *timangoyamba kuloweza kuti tingokhoza mayeso.*(If we cannot remember what we study and what we find difficult, for example, prepositions and order of adjectives, we just turn to serious memorization even if we do not understand them in order to pass examinations). (Learner 4, Dowe secondary school, 7/09/2010)

However, Wenden and Rubin (1987) states that the learner who automatically relies on rote memorization may fail to perceive the inherent meaningfulness of the material to be remembered. It was found that below average learners relied much more on this strategy than the other memory strategies but still failed. The above average learners not only used it but also combined it with other strategies to make their learning meaningful. They

reported that they used rote memorization when they met long lists of the material which they could not remember in a test or an examination. As evidence of this, an above average learner explained:

> *Kuti tikhoze kwambiri, mayeso akakhala pafupi timaloweza zinthu zomwe sitikuzimva kapena kuzikumbukira* for example, long lists and rules *ndi* grammar *monga* order of adjectives in a noun phrase *ndi ma* preposition. *Zina zonse timazikumbukira pozimvetsa mkalasi, kuchita* practice *ndi kuziwerenga kwambiri.* (In order to succeed, rote memorization helps us to remember long lists, order of some rules and confusing grammar mainly in times of tests and examinations. For example, the order of adjectives in a noun phrase and prepositions. Most of the topics we learn are remembered through understanding in class, practising and reading). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

When the teachers were interviewed, six out of eight reported that rote learning did not enhance permanent performance because the below average learners who used it frequently were failures. Learners easily failed what they memorized if the wording of the questions or order was changed. In many instances, they ended up giving back what they memorized on a wrong question because of lack of understanding and application.

As evidence of this, one teacher said:

> Rote memorization is highly used by the below average as a memory strategy but it does not help them to pass examinations because when questioning order and language is changed, they fail to think and relate (Aliko secondary school 3/10/2010)

From the above quotations, rote memorization was highly used by the below average learners to remember work done in order to give the same back during examinations word for word without understanding. The 44 out of 48 below average learners who used rote memorisation reported they used it because of not having enough time and too much

work that made them just memorise when examinations were near. This resulted in their failure. Out of the 48 above average learners, 19 reported that they used rote memorization only when they had long lists and in order to perform better. The remaining 28 did not use rote memorization but stored the long lists through practising and reviewing for a period of time. When the teachers were asked, it was reported that rote memorization did not enhance performance and they discouraged it as an archaic strategy of learning among secondary school learners. Instead they encouraged their learners to understand the material and work hard all the time instead of working hard the last minute when they heard about the impending examinations. Rote memorization is not in line with constructivism which states that the purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning and not just memorizing right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1.3.2 Reviewing work done

Reviewing means going over work done at carefully spaced intervals, close together and then more widely spaced apart. This is also called spiralling (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 4, 47 out of 48 above average and only 16 out of 48 below average learners used this strategy in order to remember what they learnt. This shows that the above average learners used this strategy very highly. Few of the below average used this strategy. The below average ones failed to review their work seriously and many gave excuses of lack of time. Others sighted household chores, distance from their homes, blackouts and lack of electricity in their homes. This could be because the below average failed to organize their time to review. Teachers reported that the below average learners

were always procrastinating although they were reminded that procrastination was an enemy of academic excellence. Asking them why they failed to review their work seriously, one of the below average learners said:

> *Timalephera kuwerenga nsanga zomwe tangoziphunzira chifukwa zochita ndi zambiri ndipo nthawi sipezeka. Timakhala tikuphunzira nthawi zonse nthawi zina ndi usiku omwe.* (We fail to review the work done because there is too much work and we do not find time to review the work done seriously. We are always learning and sometimes we have night classes). (Learner 6, Bomba secondary school, 27/08/2010)

However, the above average learners reported that reviewing the work done on the four language skills helped them to store the information in the long term memory. This is in line with the information processing model which states that for learning to take place, information must be stored in the long term memory so that it can be retrieved when required. Answering why they reviewed their work, an above average learner also said:

> *Ndimawerenga* notes *zanga tikangotha kuphunzira* English *chifukwa ndimaopa kuti pakapita nthawi ndiziiwala.*I review my short notes soon after the English class because I can forget easily if it takes long. (Learner 4 Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

The statements show that the above average planned their time well but with the same environment the below average complained about time to review their work. It was reported by all teachers that reviewing work done improved learners' memory and understanding resulting in meaningful learning and higher performance. Teachers reported that they always reminded their learners about the importance of this strategy but few below average learners reviewed seriously. This affected their performance negatively.

Commenting on the relationship between reviewing work done and performance, a teacher explained:

> Reviewing work done aims at over learning the material in order to be so familiar with the information so that it becomes natural and automatic. This makes the material to be retained in the long term memory and to retrieve it easily during examinations leading to learners' high performance. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 28/07/2010)

The study found a strong relationship between reviewing work done and learners' performance. The above average students who reviewed their work seriously were successful. This showed that reviewing work done contributed to their success. Learners who were lazy in reviewing their work failed.

In summary of cognitive strategies, the study found a strong relationship between practice in the four language skills, note-making and summary and reviewing work done with how learners performed. However the study found a weak relationship between rote memorization and highlighting with performance.

4.2 Compensation strategies used by secondary school learners

The study found that learners used compensation strategies to make up for their inadequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Compensation strategies used by learners

Compensation Strategies	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Code-switching	23	31
Delaying when Speaking	40	30
Avoiding Communication	22	40

The study found that both above and below average learners used code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication in order to compensate for their limited knowledge of spoken English. The table also shows the learners who used this strategy. The below average learners from all types of schools rarely practiced speaking. This resulted into such learners code-switching to Chichewa highly and avoiding communication whenever a chance to speak arose. Despite their high use of these strategies, the below average learners performed poorly. In comparison with the below average students, the above average used delaying when speaking highly and few used code-switching and avoiding communication. This reveals that the above average students made efforts to remain in the English conversations. The study further found a weak relationship between all the compensation strategies the learners used and performance.

4.2.1 Code-switching

With reference to Table 5, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 23 above average and 31 below average learners code-switched to Chichewa when speaking English. This

shows that the strategy was used by the below average learners more than the above average learners. Asking how code-switching assisted them, a below average learner said:

> *Kusakaniza Chichewa ndi chizungu kumatithandiza kuti nkhani isathele pompo pamene mau a chizungu athawa m'mutu. Zimatithandizanso kumvetsa zomwe akutiphunzitsa mosavuta.* (Code switching to Chichewa helps us to continue a conversation even when we cannot recall the appropriate structure of English words. It also helps us to understand new content and new knowledge is transmitted effectively). (Chombo secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Code-switching to Chichewa was common when learners were communicating with their peers and teachers. Learners at Dowe CDSS were observed reading the passage in English but discussing the contents in Chichewa and English. Asked why they code-switched, one above average learner said:

> *Timayankhula m'Chichewa kuti aliyense athe kupereka maganizo mosavuta Tikakambirana m'chizungu ambiri sayankha ndipo samamva.Timalankhula chizungu pokachita* present *ndi polankhula ndi aphunzitsi. (*We turn to Chichewa so that all of us should contribute freely. If we use English only, many will not understand and contribute. We make sure that we use only English when presenting and speaking to the teacher). (Dowe CDSS, 3/10/2010)

The study found a weak relationship between code-switching and performance because although it partly enhanced speech performance by helping learners to remain in a conversation, spoken English was not examinable. In addition, the below average who mostly used it performed poorly in all the four language skills.

Commenting on code-switching and its failure to enhance learning, a teacher said:

> If over used, code-switching discourage learners from practising the target language because they end up using few English words and more Chichewa words. (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

It was reported that learners code-switched in the classroom frequently because they were spoilt during their early years of learning English in that there was no speech practice and encouragement. According to the secondary school objectives for English language learning, by form three learners were supposed to communicate in English fluently (Malawi Institute of Education, 2002). Teachers explained that to overcome this challenge, they tried to help learners' practice by making sure code-switching is not overdone and is phased out in the English language classroom as learners advanced. This was done by encouraging learners to use simple words to communicate.

The results show that on average, the below average learners code-switched more than the above average ones. This could be because of their knowledge of English language which was more limited than was the case with the other group. The statements also indicate that teachers and above average learners code-switched for solidarity in order to help the below average understand and with time they got used. These results agree with Kalong (2008) who found that people code-switch for solidarity as well as to signal group membership and local identification. This is also in line with Vygotsky's constructivist theory which states that the knowledgeable assist the less knowledgeable to learn.

4.2.2 Delaying when speaking

Out of 96 learners interviewed, 70 said that in order to overcome their limitations in speaking, they delayed the speech using words like "mmm", "aaaa", "eeem" in order to have enough time to think about what to say. Others delayed while scratching their heads. Out of the 96 interviewed, 40 above average and 30 below average learners used this strategy.

A below average learner explained:

> *Kulankhula mochedwetsa kumathandiza kuti tisankhe mawu tisanayankhule kuopa kuchita manyazi tikalephera* (Delaying in speaking English helps us to select our vocabulary before speaking to avoid being embarrassed). (Bomba secondary school, 3/10/2010)

The above average learners tried to speak in English more regularly than the below average ones. As evidence of delaying when speaking, one above average learner reported:

> I scratch my head when I am in problems with speaking and then say what ever comes out. (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 21/07/2010)

Teachers said that there was a weak relationship between delaying in speaking and performance because speaking was not examinable. When commenting on this fact, a teacher said:

> Delaying in speaking makes the speaker remember what to say next but it does not enhance performance directly because speaking is not examined in English here in Malawi. (Teacher 2, Dowe secondary school, 17/08/2010)

MALAWI COLLECTION

Such sentiments suggest that teachers should assist learners to speak English by being role models and giving encouragement to learners that speaking should be taken seriously because competence in spoken English is the main qualification for a lot of jobs (Matiki, 2001).

4.2.3 Avoiding communication partially or totally

The study observed that learners avoided communication in English especially when difficulties and embarrassment were anticipated. With reference to Table 5, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 22 above average and 40 below average learners avoided communicating in English. The below average ones were observed avoiding communicating in English. For example, they said they hated going to the staff room because teachers would communicate to them in English. When there was a need to go to the staff room, they were spotted rehearsing what to say.

Commenting on why they avoided communication, a below average learner said:

> *Kuyankhula chizungu ndisakudziwa kumandisowetsa mtendere. Izi zimandichititsa kuzemba anthu okonda kuyankhula mu chizungu monga aphunzitsi. Nthawi zina amatimoka, kutikonza kapena kutifunsa chizungu pamaso pa aphunzitsi ena ndiponso anzathu. Tikalakwitsa amatikumbukira ndi ma* mistakes *amenewo ndipo nthawi zina limasanduka dzina lathu.*

(Using English when I do not know it very well makes me feel tense. This makes me avoid communicating in the language with people who know it very well like teachers to avoid being embarrassed. Some of these teachers mock, correct and test us with questions in front of other teachers and learners. If we make an English grammar mistake, we are remembered with that mistake and sometimes it becomes our name). (Learner 1, Chombo secondary school, 8/08/2010)

In the classroom, some of such learners did not raise their hands even if they knew the answers. Teachers had to force them to answer questions. The study found a weak relationship between avoiding communication and performance. It was reported that this strategy reduced efforts by learners to practice the target language. Tarone (1977) also noted that avoiding communication as a strategy is not directly related to learning because it does not address areas of confusion. Concurring with the above statement an above average learner said:

Ndimaona kuti kuli bwino kumayesetsa kulankhula ngati mmene achitira mwana chifukwa timaphunzira kuchokera pa ma mistakes *athu (It* is better to keep on trying to speak like a child than to avoid communication because we learn from our mistakes). (Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

The statements clearly show that it was mostly the below average learners who failed to speak English and used avoiding communication strategy most unlike the above average who tried. Although avoiding communication as a learning strategy has an advantage of keeping the learner emotionally protected, it goes against the aim of speaking and as such it cannot promote any language learning skill. This means learners should just be

encouraged to interact in English by encouraging them that learning comes through mistakes.

Overall, the study found that learners used compensation strategies of code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication. The study found a weak relationship between all the compensation strategies the learners used and performance.

4.3 Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners

The study revealed that learners used meta-cognitive strategies and that all the meta-cognitive strategies learners used promoted their performance. The meta-cognitive strategies which the learners used and their relationship with performance have further been discussed and analyzed in Table 6 and the sections that follow.

Table 6: Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners

Meta-cognitive Strategy	**Above Average learners out of 48**	**Below Average Learners out of 48**
Paying attention	45	40
Planning	43	19
Evaluating	36	12

With reference to Table 6, learners used the sub-strategies of paying attention, arranging and planning for their learning and evaluating their learning. Both types of learners were

rated highly on attention. However, only the above average learners were rated highly on planning. Lastly, the above average learners evaluated their learning but the below average ones also lagged behind. The meta- cognitive sub- strategies learners used and how they were related to their performance have been analyzed and discussed further in the following sections.

4.3.1 Paying attention

The study revealed that paying attention was the highest used sub-strategy by all types of learners in the whole study. It was found that 45 out of 48 above average and 40 out of 48 below average learners used this meta-cognitive strategy. Results revealed that the first step in managing the learning of English was to pay attention to details and become part of the learning process. It was learnt that this strategy was highly used because in the classrooms, paying attention was compulsory and those who disturbed mostly did it without the knowledge of the teacher. On the importance of this strategy, a teacher explained:

> Paying attention to what is said in the classroom is the first step to success. A learner who misses English classes hardly performs very well. The below average learners pay attention but some do not understand. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 27/08/2010)

All teachers during interviews reported that learners showed their attention by being quiet and facing the teacher to capture the mouth and the body language.

Teacher 1 from Bomba during interviews said this about the evidence of attention:

> If you move to another place learners' eyes follow. (Bomba secondary school, 28/09/2010)

Observation revealed that in every class, learners used this strategy of paying attention mostly during listening and speaking. One of the above average learners during the individual learner interview commented on what he did in order to pay attention in detail.

> *Ndimayesetsa kupewa khalidwe lokhala mkalasi koma maganizo ali kutali. Ndimayesetsa kuiwala mavuto anga ndikungoganiza za kuphunzira ndi kumangomvetsera. (*I try to avoid the tendency of being physically in class but mentally and emotionally being thousands of kilometres away. I make sure I forget my worries, just think of the lesson and pay attention). (Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Through observation, it was found that learners used this strategy very much especially at Aliko and Bomba secondary schools. The high numbers of both above and below average learners paying attention revealed that the strategy was a very important tool for learning. To capture everything in the classroom, learners were very organized with pens and exercise books for English and just before the lesson began, there was silence. Learners from Bomba were observed resisting dozing by standing up at the back of the class in order not to miss anything. However, observation showed that at Chombo CDSS, there were 5 learners out of a class of 67 and at Dowe School, 15 out of 100 learners on average who were not attentive. Some were copying notes for different subjects while others disturbed their classmates by making noise.

The study found that paying attention had a high and strong relationship with performance. Out of the 48 above average learners, 26 reported that they were not forced to be attentive but consciously wanted to remain focussed in order to achieve their goals. Thinking about their goals made them more attentive and this resulted into high performance. The below average learners used attention highly but performed poorly and it was reported that it was because they pretended to be attentive because it was a must to be quiet and face the teacher. Teachers reported that a number of below average learners looked attentive for fear of the teacher but were not focussed. For example, they were observed failing to answer questions asked on what the teacher had just said. This lack of focus contributed to their failure. Asking a below average learner why she failed after being observed looking very attentive, she said:

> *Ndimaoneka ngati ndikumvetsera koma maganizo anga amakhala pa mavuto omwe ndimakomana nawo pa moyo wanga monga umphawi ndi kusalidwa ndi anzanga* (I look very attentive but my mind switches to my worries about life. For example, I think about poverty and rejection by peers). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

Commenting on whether below average learners paid attention in class, teachers concurred that some learners perform poorly because they fail to concentrate on learning but think about their family misfortunes. They get emotionally affected even after counselling them. According to the information processing model, paying attention is the first step and the most important. The way the information has been received will determine if the brain has processed and stored the correct information or not. If incorrect information is stored it will be retrieved during examinations leading to low performance.

Such being the case, learners need to be serious and interact with friends and teachers on where they are not clear before the learnt material is stored in the long term memory.

4.3.2 Organizing and planning for one's learning

With reference to Table 6 above, this meta- cognitive strategy was used by 43 above average and only 19 below average learners. All teachers reported that learners who used this strategy seriously performed considerably well. Concurring with this, a teacher explained:

> We encourage planning their learning because it enhances their performance and that lack of it is planning to fail. (Bomba secondary school, 15/9/2010)

The sub- strategies learners used have further been discussed in Table 7.

Table 7: Organizing and planning as a meta-cognitive strategy

Organizing and planning for one's learning strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Organizing their Learning	46	26
Finding out about Learning	44	18
Goal setting	39	13

Within the organizing and planning for one's learning strategy, learners used the sub-strategy sets of organizing, finding out about language learning and setting goals. In all the meta-cognitive sets, the above average learners were rated highly compared to the below average ones.The study found a strong relationship between all the organizing and

planning sets and performance. The organizing and planning sets are further discussed in detail.

4.3.2.1 Organizing

This involves the organising of one's schedule, physical environment like space, temperature, sound, lighting and a language note book (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 7, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed 46 above average and 26 below average used this strategy. This shows that the above average ones used it more than the below average ones. Teachers suggested that this could be because the above average learners were more focused on their learning than the others who lacked motivation. The above average learners reported that they organized their materials by collecting and classifying them by topic, grammatical pattern or language skill for easy reference. They organized their time such that everything was done on time. For example, they were observed sitting quietly with English exercise books and pens ready and were attentive to their teacher. On what they did to get organized, an above average learner reported:

> *Timachita dongosolo powerengeratu zokaphunzira mawa lake kukonzekera kukafunsa ndi kuyankha mafunso mkalasi. Tikapatsidwa zoti tichite timaika mapoints mu ndondomeko. Mwachitsanzo zokayankhula, ma* composition note-making and summary *timaziika mu ndondomeko kuti zigwirizane komanso kuti tisabwereze bwereze. (*We start getting organized by reading about the coming topic in advance ready to answer and ask questions on the lesson. When we are given activities to do, we organize points before doing any task. For example, in public speeches, compositions, note making, summaries, we organize in order to write coherently and avoid repetitions). (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 9/09/2010)

All types of learners reported that they organized their learning by having a language note book to write what they encountered in language learning and making study time tables in order to schedule regular practice for each language skill. Commenting on the importance of having the time table, another above average learner explained:

> *Ndimakopera* timetable *ya mkalasi ndi kuigwiritsa ntchito popanga yanga kuti ndiziwerenga phunziro lisanafike kapena titangophunzira kumene. Izi zimatithandiza pochita dongosolo monga kulemberatu homework ndi kutenga mabuku oyenelera.* (I copy the class time table and use it to come up with my own study time table in order to study subjects before and after the class. This helps me to be organized by writing assignments required in the coming lesson and carrying the right materials). (Aliko focus group 2, 30/07/2010)

However, a number of learners from Chombo and Dowe schools reported that they had the time tables but failed to follow them because of disturbances like friends, lack of electricity in their homes, black outs, household chores and mare procrastination. As evidence of this, a below average learner reported:

> *Ma* timetable *ochitira zinthu tiri nawo koma timalephera kuwatsata bwinobwino. Nthawi zina timachedwa ndi zibalo, timachokera kutali, komanso nthawi zina timangozengereza chifukwa chocheza komanso kutanganidwa ndi ntchito za pakhomo. Chinanso ma* blackouts, *kutentha, udzudzu ndi kusowa ndalama zogulira ma* torch *zimasokoneza ndondomeko ya zinthu. (*We have the time tables for different activities but to follow them correctly is a problem. Sometimes we delay with punishments, others come from very far and sometimes we just postpone activities due to chatting with friends and house hold chores. On the organisation of the learning environment, black outs, the hot weather, mosquitoes and lack of money to get lamps and torches make us fail to get organised and do things on time). (Dowe CDSS, 18/09/2010)

These statements indicate that the below average learners had a poor organisation of activities and that they were lazy and not motivated. The above average learners who were focussed could easily avoid the punishments and schedule time for chatting with friends and do household chores. Some above average learners had similar situations but their plans were achieved. All teachers reported that getting organized helped learners to understand and led to their higher performance. Getting organized in their learning also made learners perform well during tests and examinations because they got organized in advance. Commenting on organisation, one teacher explained:

> Many below average learners are not organised. They do things in panic in the last minute and they end up doing things quickly and not well done. Examples of these things could be preparation for examinations, assignments, and even the next class. Some come to class and stay idle without writing exercises saying they have forgotten their pens and exercise books. (Teacher 2, Chombo CDSS, 10/10/2010)

The above sentiments reveal that getting organised and prepared for learning and examinations is an important step to high performance. It is necessary for teachers to train learners on time management and how to detect and avoid time wasters.

4.3.2.2 Finding out about their learning

Finding out about their learning means the learners' self management or understanding the conditions that help one learn and arrange for those conditions (Ellis, 1994). Learners reported that finding out about their learning as a strategy helped them to get organized. In line with table 7, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 44 above average and 18 below average used this strategy. This shows that few below average learners

used this strategy. Teachers suggested that it could be because the below average always wanted to be told and reminded and were not ready to find out things for themselves. They liked to be spoon fed on everything. Learners were reminded that they had the responsibility of finding out about their language learning. For example, learners aired out things which hindered their language learning through their prefects and class teachers to the authorities. For example, they reported the persistent absenteeism of their language teacher, shortage of language books and the teachers' teaching in relation to national examination system among the hindrances. On what they did to find out about their learning, one above average learner explained:

> *Timafufuza m'mene mayeso adzakhalire, m'mene aphunzitsi akuphunzitsira pofanizira ndi syllabus, mabuku ofunika ndi zoyenera kuchita kuti tizikhoze. Timakaperekanso madandaulo kwa achikulire athu pa zinthu zomwe zikusokoneza maphunziro.* (We find out the nature of the national examinations, the pace teachers take in relation to the syllabus, required text books and what to do to improve our performance. We also air out the things that hinder our learning to the authorities). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 18/09/2010)

Commenting on learners' responsibility for their learning, a teacher explained:

> The strongest inspector is the learner him or herself. Learners are able to know if teaching and learning is taking place or not and if the teaching will help them achieve their goal of passing examinations and not just knowing the language. They react if things are not normal. (Teacher 2, Bomba secondary school, 20/09/2010)

Learners also applied self management skills by being resourceful. They pestered their parents to buy the required books; borrowed materials from friends; inquired about learning from other schools and on what to do in order to succeed. Commenting on resourcefulness, a focus group above average learner explained:

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIB

MALAWI COLLECTION

> We ask our friends what and how they study and try to befriend the successful ones in order to learn more on their learning habits. (Dowe secondary school, 26/07/2010)

The excerpts show that learners were always finding out about how best to learn and to succeed. Asking the below average learners if they found out about their learning, one of them said:

> *Pa za maphunzirozi, pali zinthu zina timafufuza nawo monga kujomba ndi khalidwe la aphunzitsi. Zambiri timangoyangana chifukwa alipo eni ake amene amazitsata ndipo ife timangomva zothaitha.* (Concerning our learning, there are some things in which we get involved to find out like the absence and the behaviour of our teacher. However, there are certain things which have responsible people who follow them and we just hear the outcomes). (Chombo CDSS 26/07/2010)

The statements by this below average learner show that such learners were not seriously involved in finding out about their learning. They failed to manage their learning in several instances. For example, a teacher reported a situation where some below average learners were entering the hall to write an English examination without knowing the subject of the examination. That is, whether it was an English composition, multiple choice or comprehension paper. This means that they did not prepare for the specific paper. The study found a strong relationship between the strategy of finding out about one's learning and performance because learners who always inquired about their learning performed much better than those who did not. This strategy was used more by the above average learners who succeeded in their learning. The below average looked not concerned much about their learning. The above statements suggest the need for training learners that learning begins with the learner himself or herself and they are required to take the responsibility for their own learning. Authorities cannot be aware of

all the hindrances of learning if not informed. They also need to be reminded frequently in order to take action. Knowing that learners have this responsibility on their learning, learning institutions should also learn to address learners' grievances with seriousness or apologise and explain clearly why they fail to honour their grievances to avoid riots and strikes by learners. For example, absenteeism, rudeness and laziness of teachers are some of the issues which can be resolved.

4.3.2.3 Setting goals and objectives

According to Table 7 above, 39 above average, and 13 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the above average learners used this strategy more frequently than the below average ones. Rubin and Wenden (1987) state that learners without aims are like boats without rudders and such learners do not know where they are going so they might not get there. The above average and the few below average reported that they set goals and objectives on how to study every evening and when to finish their assignments. They reported that all their goals of achieving the four language skills led to the main goals of passing examinations and achieving their careers. Commenting on setting goals an above average learner explained:

> *Kukhala ndi zolinga zoti ndikwaniritse zimakhala zikundikumbutsa zofunika kuchita pa chaka, pa* term, *pamulungu pa* day *komanso pa* hour. *Chifukwa chakuti popanda kukhoza* English *palibe MSCE* certificate *ndipo ndi chiyankhulo chofunika. Ndimayesetsa kukhala ndi zolinga zondithandiza kulimbikira kwambiri. Mwachitsanzo ndimakhala ndi zolinga zoti ndizikhala pakati pa* number *1 kapena 3 pa ntchito kapena mayeso ali wonse chaka chino. Ndikamakhoza ndimakhala ndi chidwi kukwaniritsa zolingazi. Ndikasankha zolinga zanga ndikulonjeza ena monga makolo, aphunzitsi ndi anzanga zimandithandiza kupewa zina zonse ndi kuzipereka. Ndi chifukwa chake ndimakhoza kwambiri.*

(Goal setting is a reminder of what I must do in a year, term, week, day or hour. English being a deciding subject for passing MSCE and official means of communication, I make sure I set goals that will make me work very hard. For example, I set the goal that in my class, I should always take positions one to three in every language skill and test in this school year. It keeps me motivated to achieve the goal. Choosing a goal and promising others like my parents, teacher or friends to do well lead me to a greater feeling of self control and commitment and therefore a better performance). (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 19/08/2010)

The above statements conform that goal-setting is an important element of motivation and self-efficacy and encourages learner autonomy. For the below average learners, the few who said they set goals said they failed to achieve higher goals like taking high positions because they could not achieve them. Instead, their goal was to pass examination even with the lowest grade. One of the below average learners said:

Sitimalinga zambiri chifukwa sitingazikwanitse. Ife timangofuna kukhoza mayeso basi. Kukhoza ndi kukhoza, kaya ukhonza ndi 40% koma ukhala ndi pepala. Ife sitiphunzira ndi phuma ngati enawa koma potsiriza tonse ndi certificate *basi.* (We do not aim high because we cannot afford it. Our goal is to pass examinations. Passing is passing even if one passes with 40% but will still have the certificate. We do not panic when learning like these others but in the end we will all get a certificate). (Dowe CDSS, 20/09/2010)

Another below average learner said:

Ine sindikonda kukhala ndi zolinga kapena kulonjeza chifukwa palibe chimene ndingapindule. Lamulo langa ndi lakuti first things first. *Ndikatero ndimaona kuti zonse zikutha. Mwachitsanzo panopo sindingayambe kuganiza za mayeso pamene ma* homework *ali mbwee. Inetu ngakhale nditakhala ndi zolinga zotani kuti ndilimbikire ndimakhoza marks ake omweomweo basi. Chofunika apa ndichoti osamazipweteka ndi ntchito.*

(I don't like goal setting when learning because there is nothing I can achieve from that. My rule is doing first things first and I find myself doing things and finishing them. For example I cannot think of working for examinations when I have assignments to write. For me, no matter how I set my goals to work hard, in the end I get the same grade. The best way is not to overwork). (Chombo CDSS 18/09/2010)

The above statements show that the below average learners did not set high goals and others did not even have goals in their learning because of their continued under performance. They had no self-efficacy and lacked motivation leading to lack of focus. This promoted their low performance. Teachers reported that learners set goals especially the above average ones but many of the goals were kept by themselves. Learners who set high goals like going to the university to achieve a career were seen working extra hard and achieved their short term goals like studying schedules, practice and asking for assistance. One of the teachers reported:

Our learners set their goals in learning English but only few reveal them to us especially when counselling and guiding them in their career. We try to train them on the importance of goal setting during life skill teaching as a subject. Through learners' hardworking and seriousness we know they have goals to achieve. The below average also have goals but many of them are also below standard leading to low achievement. (Teacher 2, Bomba secondary school 2/10/2010)

The study found a strong relationship between setting goals and objectives and performance. The above average learners who set high goals and objectives to achieve worked hard to fulfil them leading to their success. The below average ones tried but with the loss of direction, they got confused and failed to perform well. This suggests that teachers should train their learners to work hard and aim high.

4.3.3 Evaluating one's learning

Evaluating one's learning means checking the outcomes of one's language learning against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy (Chamot, 1987). In conjunction with Table 7, 36 above average and 12 below average learners reported using this strategy. The study found that evaluating one's learning enhanced performance. The evaluation strategies which learners used and their relationship with performance have further been analysed and shown in Table 8 and discussion in the sections that follow.

Table 8: Evaluation as a meta-cognitive strategy

Evaluating one's learning	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Self-monitoring	33	10
Self-evaluation	39	14

Table 8 above shows that learners used the sub-meta-cognitive strategies of evaluating their learning. Learners used the evaluation sets of self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Above average learners evaluated their learning much more than the below average ones. The study found a strong relationship between all evaluation sets of strategies and performance. These evaluation sets have further been discussed and analysed in the sections that follow.

4.3.3.1 Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring means checking, verifying and correcting one's comprehension or performance in the course of a language task (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Oxford (1990) defines it as the noticing and correcting of learners' own errors in any of the language skills.Table 8 shows that 33 above average and 10 below average learners reported using it. This could be because of lack of knowledge about the strategy. The learners reported that they noticed their errors in the four language skills and corrected them. As evidence of this statement, a below average learner explained:

> *Polankhula kapena polemba ndimakhala ndi kumvetsera mmutumu kuti ndikonze zolakwika.* For example *ndimaiwala kuti popereka moni masana ndimati* good morning *mmalo monena kuti* good afternoon. *Koma ukamaganiza umakonza pompo. Ndikakumbukira nditanena kale ndimayesetsa kuti ndisabwerezenso* mistake *imeneyo.* (I become attentive to myself so that when I notice a mistake I should correct it. For example when greeting my friends, in the afternoon I always say *good morning* instead of *good afternoon* but through monitoring I review it. Sometimes I realize a long time after speaking and I make sure that I do not repeat the same mistake). (Learner 2, Bomba secondary school, 3/10/2010)

The statements indicate that the few below average learners monitored their skills in language learning although lack of adequate practice strategies as previously stated hindered them. The only problem was lack of memory and knowledge of a number of grammar rules and vocabulary which made them fail to notice many errors when speaking and writing. The above average learners also reported that they monitored their language strictly. This agrees with Krashen's (1985) monitor hypothesis which states that before a learner produces an utterance, he or she internally scans it for errors and uses the learned system to make corrections. Commenting on self monitoring, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndimaona ndi kukonza pomwe ndalakwitsa polankhula, kulemba ndi zina zonse. Mwa chitsanzo pa* speaking *ndimakhala ndikuganiza za* grammar *monga ma* tense. *Ndikaona kuti ndalakwitsa chifukwa choiwala kapena kungophonyetsa ndimakonza pompo kapena nthawi ina. Polemba ma* composition *ndimaona zolakwa zanga pa* draft *ndipo ndimakonza polemba ya* final. *Izitu zimandithandiza kupeza marks okwera pa* composition. (I notice and correct my errors in all the four language skills. For example, when speaking, I think of the grammar rules like verb tenses and when I notice an error because of forgetting the right word or just a slip of the tongue, I correct instantly or later on my own. When writing compositions, I notice errors in my draft or before handing in my work and then correct them. This helps me to get higher marks in my compositions). (Learner 5 Aliko secondary school 2/10/2010)

However, Oxford (1990) states that learners should not become obsessed with correcting every speech difficulty because this would kill communication. The study found a strong relationship between self monitoring and performance because learners who reported that they self- monitored themselves during communication and after completing a task performed highly. Self-monitoring assisted them to think of using better strategies on given tasks in order to improve their performance. Commenting on the below average and performance, a teacher said:

> Learners use the monitoring strategy and it enhances performance especially in writing and reading comprehension which are examined. This works better with the above average learners who have enough knowledge of the language. Some below average learners monitor their language skills but it does not assist them to perform successfully because they lack the knowledge of the language and it results in monitoring incorrectly. (Teacher 1, Chombo secondary school, 11/10/2010)

From these statements, there is need to train learners to monitor their language or involve critical friends to assist them especially in reading and comprehension and writing. This can fulfil Vygotsky's theory which states that learning occurs in social groupings.

4.3.3.2 Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation means checking the outcomes of one's own language performance against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). With reference to Table 8, only 23 above average and 11 below average learners reported they used this strategy. Learners reported that they judged their overall execution of a task. Learners compared their grades with their friends' and analyzed what went wrong and what to do next in order to improve. For example, they improved their grades by studying harder. Commenting on evaluation of one's learning, an above average learner explained:

> *Pakutha pa* term *kapena tsiku, ndimakhala pansi kuganiza ma* strengths *ndi ma* weakness *ndi choti ndichite. Mwachitsanzo, ndimachita* compare marks *a* term *ino ndi yathayi komanso position. Kenako ndimachita* compare *ma* grades *a anzanga. Kenaka ndimaonanso ngati ndakwera kapena kutsika. Kenako ndimaganiza chifukwa chomwe ma*grades *anga atsika ndi choti ndichite. Ndimachita izi kuti ndilimbikire kwambiri ndikusiya makhalidwe olepheretsa monga kuchita* miss *makalasi, kusamvetsera ndi kusawerenga mokwanira.* (At the end of the day or term, I sit down to think of my strengths and weaknesses and what to do. For example, I compare my terminal grades and class position with the previous ones. I also compare the grades with my friends' then find out if I have improved or not. I sit down and think of the causes of my low grades and find solutions. This could be to work extra hard and stop behaviours which contribute to failure like missing classes, not paying attention and inadequate studying). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 21/09/2010)

The below average learners also self-evaluated their learning in order to succeed. Out of 48 below average learners, 11 reported that they evaluated their learning and knew whether they were improving or not. Others said they did not because they always got a low grade.

Commenting on self evaluation, a below average learner explained:

> *Ndimaona mmene zinthu zikuyendera tikalandira mapepala a mayeso ndi za mkalasi. Ndikalandira* test paper *ndimatenga la mzanga ndikuchita* correction *kuti ndisadzalepherenso zomwezo.* (I self-evaluate my learning after tests or language activities. I receive the papers and borrow my friends' to make corrections so that I should not fail the same question again). (Aliko secondary school, 18/09/2010)

> *Ine sindichita stock za mmene maphunziro akuyendera chifukwa* marks *anga ndi omweo otsika pa* test *iri yonse. China nso ndi choti sitimadziwa kuti kuona mmene zinthu zikuyendera ndikofunika pa maphunziro.* (I do not evaluate my learning because I know it is always a low grade in every test. The other reason is that I did not know that evaluating is important in learning. (Chombo CDSS, 17/09/2010)

In the above quotations, the first learner said he evaluated his learning and acted by just copying a friend's right answers instead of being very active to understand the material during revision by the teacher. He also does not think of hard working as an important action. This shows that the learner evaluated his overall progress but did not care much of improving it. In the last statements, the learner said he did not evaluate his learning but knew where he was as a below average learner. This shows that many learners evaluated their learning though unconsciously. Learners lacked motivation and self-efficacy to improve. This led to failure in performance. All in all, the below average checked their overall outcomes on performance in the four language skills but because of persistent failure, they could not take proper action. The role of the teachers in such cases is to motivate this type of learners.

Finding out from teachers about self-evaluation, one of them said:

> Self-evaluation in all the four language skills help learners to identify specific areas where they need more support and can seek help from teachers or peers. To the above average learners, success breeds confidence. Self-evaluation encourages them to set higher goals and commit more effort to them to improve their performance.To the below average, evaluation is there but instead of breeding confidence, it breeds negative emotions leading to hating English lessons and teachers and laziness. This promotes their failure. (Teacher 2, Dowe CDSS, 13/08/2010)

The above excerpt shows that self-evaluation of one's learning followed by a positive action improved learners' performance.The below average learners just reported that they evaluated but did not act to change for improvement. All teachers suggested that learners self-valuated and improved their performance if tests and class work were given frequently. Teachers who tested their learners at the end of the term only hindered their learners from frequent evaluation and hard work to compete. From the above sentiments, learners need to be taught how to evaluate their learning and take action because many do not know that self-evaluation is an important language learning strategy. For self-evaluation to take place frequently, teachers should try to give daily exercises and frequent testing in all the four language skills and not ignoring compositions despite having large classes.

In summary of meta-cognitive strategies, it was revealed that learners used the meta-cognitive strategies of paying attention, planning and evaluating their learning. The study found a strong relationship between all the meta-cognitive strategies and performance.

4.4 Affective strategies used by learners

The study found that learners used affective strategies in order to learn English. The study found a weak relationship between all the affective strategies and performance. These are summarized in Table 9 and the following sections.

Table 9: Affective strategies used by learners

Affective Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Lowering one's anxiety	15	33
Taking one's emotional Temperature	31	30

With reference to Table 9, 15 above average and 33 below average learners used the affective strategy of lowering one's anxiety. Out of 96 learners, 31 above average and 30 below average learners used the strategy of taking one's emotional temperature. There were variations between the above and below average learners in the use of lowering one's anxiety as a strategy. The below average used it highly. There was also a nearly balanced use of the strategy of taking emotional temperature by the above and below average learners. The sub-affective strategies which learners used will further be discussed in the sections that follow.

4.4.1 Lowering one's anxiety

According to table 10, learners used lowering one's anxiety as an affective strategy.

It was highly used by the below average learners who reported:

> *Kuchita mantha ndi kuyankhula chizungu pagulu, kulephera kumva, mayeso, kutikonza polankhula chizungu pa gulu ndi kutifunsa mafunso amene sitidziwa mayankho ake kumatichititsa kukhala ndi nkhawa ndi mantha pophunzira.* (The fear of communicating orally, public speaking, non comprehension, tests, public error correction by teacher and frequent asking questions whose answers we do not know increase our anxiety). (Focus groups 1 and 2, Chombo CDSS 11/09/2010)

This quote is in line with Jarkovic (2008) who found out that the below average learners become more anxious and tensed-up when learning the language and that was why they used this strategy most. This was unlike the above averages learners who were free to learn without fear of being criticized or laughed at when using the language to participate. To lower their anxiety, learners reported that they used two sets of strategies. These were: knowing that they were not alone in their fears and beliefs and relaxing after classes. These are summarized in Table 10 and the following sections.

Table 10: Lowering anxiety as an effective strategy

Lowering anxiety Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Knowing that they were not alone in their fears	18	33
Relaxing after Classes	10	35

With reference to the Table 10 learners used the strategies of knowing that they were not alone in their fears and relaxing after classes in order to lower their anxiety. All these affective sets were highly used by the below average learners than above average

learners. The findings revealed a weak relationship between all the lowering anxiety strategies which learners used because most of the below average who used them failed in their performance. These sub-affective sets have been discussed further in the sections that follow.

4.4.1.1 Knowing that they were not alone in their fears

Learners reported that they reduced their anxiety by knowing that they were not alone in their fears and beliefs as a strategy. This strategy was reported by the learners but it has not been reported in the literature by different authors. Table 10 shows that out of 96 learners interviewed and observed 18 above average and 33 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the below average ones used it more than the above average ones. Teachers reported that the below average learners used this strategy more because they were the ones who had difficulties in English language learning. These difficulties made them have fears and become apprehensive when learning English and they resorted to this strategy to overcome their fears. This strategy helped them in that they did not bother even if friends laughed at them because of their being less knowledgeable. This caused them to have a relaxed classroom environment and increase their risk taking in different tasks. As evidence to this fact, below average learners at a focus group said:

> *Mantha ndi nkhawa pophunzira zimachepa tikadziwa kuti tonse mavuto athu ndi amodzi, aliyense ndi ophunzira. Izi zimatipangitsa kumasuka ndi kusangalala ngakhale timalephera mkalasi pongodziwa kuti vuto lathu ndi limodzi.*

(We lower our anxiety by merely knowing that we are all in the same boat. This makes us to relax and laugh with friends even if we fail to perform in the classroom. (Chombo CDSS, 7/08/2010)

These learners reported that knowing that they were not alone in their condition reduced their anxiety and led to the formation of well structured groups to discuss their condition. For example, they could discuss questions before a test. The above average learners who did not use this strategy much reported that they did not care because their aim was to make a difference by not being in the same situation of having fears. One above average learner said:

Ndimakonda kukhala omasuka ndi osaopa kanthu pophunzira English. *Ine ndine wosiyana ndi amene amachita mantha koma ndiri ngati amene amachita* aim high *kuti akhoze kwambiri.* (I like being a free person and I do not have fears when learning the language. I am not in the same situation with those who fear but with those who aim high to succeed). (Aliko secondary school 15/08/2010)

Another above average learner who used this strategy commented:

Timakhala wokondwa poona kuti tonse ndi chimodzimodzi koma tikafika pa zokhoza mkalasi timayesetsa kuti paoneke kusiyana polimbikira kwambiri. (*We* feel happy to see that we are not alone in our fears as learners but when it comes to performance, we strive to make a difference by competing through hard work). (Dowe Secondary School, 17/09/2010)

However, teachers reported that this strategy had a weak relationship with performance because it was the below average who used it most and still failed.

Concurring with this, a teacher explained:

> Sometimes learners' knowing that they were not alone failing in the classroom discouraged hardworking. It resulted into learners taking their failures lightly and labelling English as difficult. This also discouraged them to try harder. (Chombo secondary school, 27/08/2010)

From the above statements the above average learners did not use this strategy much because most of them reported that they did not fear to communicate orally, tests or public corrections. The below average ones used this strategy always but it did not help them to enhance their performance. Instead it affected them negatively by not working hard and not being concerned with their failure. This suggests that praising those who perform very well in class and announcing their grades could assist learners to know that all learners are not the same. This can encourage others to improve.

4.4.1.2 Using relaxation to lower their anxiety

Learners reported that they lowered their anxiety by relaxing after classes. With reference to Table 10, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 10 above average and 35 below average learners used this strategy. As in many affective strategies, below average learners were rated highly in the use of relaxation as a strategy. Teachers reported that relaxing is good and easy and that was why lazy learners liked it. Learners joined school activities and religious societies in order to relax and lower their anxiety. These included listening to and singing hymns and playing different games like football and basket ball to stretch their muscles.

Commenting on the use of relaxing, both below and above average learners reported:

> *Timachepetsa nkhawa za kuphunzira pochita ma* exercise *monga mpira, kuimba ndi kuseka ndi anzathu.* (We lower our anxiety by relaxing through exercises like football, singing and laughing with friends). (Focus group 2, Dowe CDSS, 7/08/2009)

They also reported that they used laughter to relax by sharing jokes with friends. Answering on how they solved linguistic challenges, one below average learner explained.

> *Kukambirana ndi mzako vuto lako pophunzira English limapepuka. Mwachitsanzo ukalephera* test. (Talking it out with a friend about a language problem makes it half solved, for example one's poor performance during a test). (Chombo CDSS, 12/09/2010)

Learners reported that talking it out and joking helped to reduce uncomfortable feelings of nervousness and worries about their English language learning. Watching movies and drama during the weekends also helped them to laugh, relax and reduce their anxiety. They forgot their weaknesses in language a bit and then started a-fresh with vigour later. Commenting on relaxing as a way of lowering anxiety, a female teacher explained:

> Books say relaxing is a strategy for reducing anxiety but if overdone, it can lead to under performance. For example, learners keep phones with radios privately and these can make them lazy by just thinking of when a class will end so that they can go and relax by listening to music. Knowing the saying that "too much work with no play made Jack a dull boy", the school, organized relaxing time. For example, sports day and religious organization days where they relax by singing every week. But to say the truth, it does not mean that this can improve performance especially in our context. (Teacher, Aliko secondary school, 27/09/2010)

4.4.2 *Taking one's emotional temperature*

Taking ones emotional temperature means self-assessment involving getting in touch with feelings, attitudes and motivations through a variety of means (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 10, out of the 96 learners interviewed, 31 above average and 30 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the strategy was highly used by all the learners. The below average used this strategy more highly compared to other non affective strategies. This was because they were the ones who were tensed up when learning the language from encountering a lot of difficulties and they just resorted to taking their emotional temperature. The strategies which learners used have been summarized in Table 11 and the following sections.

Table 11: Taking emotional temperature as an affective strategy

Taking one's emotional temperature as a strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Listening to one's body	28	33
Discussing feelings with someone else	34	27

To take their emotional temperature, learners used the strategies of listening to their body and discussing their feelings with someone else. Below average learners used listening to one's body more highly than the above average learners. There was only a slight difference in the use of discussing feelings with others as a strategy by both learners. The

study revealed a weak relationship between all the two sub-affective strategies and performance. These sub-strategies will further be discussed in the following sections.

4.4.2.1 *Listening to one's body*

Listening to one's body means paying attention to signals given by the body. The signals learners can pay attention to may be negative reflecting stress, tension, worry, fear and anger; or they may be positive indicating happiness, interest, calmness and pleasure (Oxford, 1990). Learners reported that they listened to their bodies by resting when they were sick, tired, stressed up, angered or tensed up. They also listened to their bodies when they were happy or interested. With reference to Table 11, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 28 above average and 33 below average learners used this strategy. The numbers show great use of the strategy by below average learners. These were the ones who lagged behind in many strategies in the study. Teachers stated that the high use by the below average could be because of the difficulties they faced in language learning and laziness which caused them to listen to their bodies often. This concurs with Jarkovic (2008) who in his study found that the less proficient learners highly resorted to listening to their bodies as a strategy. In evidence of listening to their bodies, one above average learner said:

> *Ndimamvetsera thupi langa ndikamadwala mutu chifukwa chowerenga kwambiri. Ndimazipatsa nthawi yopuma kuwerenga. Sinditaya nthawi ndipo ndimayesetsa kumwa mankhwala.*(I listen to my body when I have a headache after studying for a long time, I give myself a bit of relaxation after short schedules of my studies. I do not take too long and I make sure I take some medicine). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

Commenting on listening to their body, a below average learner also said:

> *Ndikasangalala kwambiri monga tikakhala pafupi kutsiriza* term *kuti tizipita ndimangoona ngati kutaya nthawi kuti ndzilowa mkalasi. Ndimalongezeratu pakangotsala milungu itatu. Ndikakhala kuti ndatopa kapena kukhumudwa ndimangonamizira kudwala kuti ndipume kulowa mkalasi.* (When I am too happy for example when the term has come to an end and we are about to go home, I just find it a waste of time to attend classes. I pack my things three weeks before closure. When I am tired or worried about something, I pretend to be sick, so that I can rest without attending classes). (Dowe secondary school, 1/10/2010)

With reference to the above statements, the above average learner used this strategy normally and it assisted him to resume work strongly. It also shows that the learner did not like being sick to relax. The below average used this strategy negatively in order to keep on relaxing. That was why the number of below average learners who listened to their bodies as a strategy rose up compared to the above average ones. All teachers reported that this strategy cannot be encouraged because many learners like relaxing. In evidence of this a teacher explained:

> Listening to the body is a good strategy because after attending to the requests of the body to rest one resumes learning with strength. Forcing the body to work does not work because you take time to do simple activities. However, this strategy is not emphasized because some learners especially the below average are lazy and take advantage of this strategy to over rest. This leads to their failure. (Teacher 1, Bomba secondary school, 2/10/2010)

As expressed by the teacher, the study found a weak relationship between listening to the body and performance because sometimes it was overdone.The above average learners who did not use it much preformed highly while the below average ones who used it frequently failed to perform well. Some learners always found small reasons to relax. The

below average ones used this most frequently because they accompanied it with laziness. The statements indicate that listening to one's body is a helpful and health promoting strategy. Teachers have the duty of knowing their learners' behaviours. There is also a need to advise learners on the importance of saying the truth because we have heard of learners being ignored while sick up to the point of death because of their' previous frequent lies in order to listen to their bodies.

4.4.2.2 Discussing feelings with someone else

Learners took their emotional temperature by discussing their feelings about language learning with their friends, teachers and others. Learners reported that language learning was not easy and they needed to discuss the challenges with others. Learners reported the challenges which triggered their emotions including teachers favouring others when teaching and marking tests; making unfair comparisons between learners and others; low marks earned and ill remarks from fellow learners among others. Learners improved their emotional temperature by discussing their language learning problems and what to do with friends. As evidence of this, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndinali okhumudwa chifukwa chomangolephera note making komanso ndi ma comments a aphunzitsi kuti ndiri* dull. *Ndinali pafupi kulira koma mzanga ananditonthoza kuti aphunzitsi amenewa ambiri amawadandaula koma njira yabwino ndi kuiwala ndi kuyamba kulimbikira. Mzangayu anandibwereka buku la ku library lofotokoza bwino* note-making *ndipo ndinayamba kumvetsa. Kuyambira pompo aphunzitsi aja anasanduka amzanga.(*I was very disappointed when I kept on failing note-making and the teacher's remarks in which she said I was dull. I nearly cried but my friend counselled me to say I was not the only one who complained about that teacher and the best way was to forget about her and work hard. She lent me a nice book from the library on note making and I improved. Since then the teacher turned to out to be my friend). (Bomba secondary school, 7/09/2010)

This statement shows that friends encouraged the learner to work hard leading to improved performance. This also achieves Vygotsky's theory concerning the Zone of Proximal Development which says learning becomes successful when the knowledgeable assist the less knowledgeable. Asking the below average how discussing feelings with others helped them a below average learner explained:

> Discussing feelings with friends is important *chifukwa pamalo pamakoma ndi anzako kuti azikuthandiza zochita.* For example, *mumakambirana za kukhosi komanso ngati wapalamula kuofesi.* (Discussing feelings with friends is important because they assist you on what to do. For example, you discuss private things and also when you have a case to answer at the office). (Learner 8, Aliko secondary school, 14/09/2010)

The statement by the below average learner shows that friends were not mainly there to help them in their language learning but for chatting and personal advice. This shows that the friends did not assist them to improve their performance. Asking teachers whether discussing feelings improved learners' performance, a teacher said:

> Sometimes discussing feelings helped especially to the above average who valued their learning most. To the below average who valued chatting and misbehaving, most of the times they discussed things which were not related to learning. (Teacher 1 Chombo secondary school 17/09/2010)

The above statement shows that the below average who used the strategy most did not use it for learning. This means although their worries were reduced, they could not perform highly. The study found a weak relationship between discussing learners feelings about language with others because not all discussions resulted in the learners improvement in learning. Out of 8 teachers, 6 reported that some learners counselled their friends and advised them to react negatively leading to more frustrations.

In summary, the study found that all affective strategies did not promote high performance. This is in line with Mullins (1992) who found a weak relationship between affective strategies and admission test scores. The above average learners that used them were successful because they mixed them with other strategies.

4.5 Social strategies used by learners

The study revealed that learners used social strategies in order to learn English. A strong relationship between one social strategy use and performance was found. The social strategies learners used will be discussed in reference to Table 12 and the following sections.

Table 12: Social strategies used by learners

Social Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Asking questions	39	18
Cooperating with others	28	30

Table 12 shows the social strategies which above and below learners used. Learners used the sub-strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others. Out of the two, the study found a strong relationship between asking questions and performance. The social strategies learners used will be discussed in relation to Table 12.

4.5.1 Asking questions

Out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 39 above average learners and 18 below average learners used this sub-social strategy. This shows that it was the above average learners who used this strategy more than the below average ones. The above average learners said that they asked more questions in order to understand and perform better. Commenting on the importance of questions on performance, an above average learner said:

> *Kufunsa aphunzitsi ndi anzathu kumatithandiza kuchita bwino pa mayeso chifukwa zinthu zomwe sitizimvetsa zimanveka akamatithandiza payekhapayekha.* (Asking questions to our teachers and fellow learners help us to perform better during examinations because issues which are not clear in class are also clarified during individual help). (Learner 4, Dowe CDSS, 17/09/2010)

Learners were observed asking the teacher and fellow learners what to do in the classroom. They always asked for clarification, repetition and verification. Commenting on the importance of asking, a below average learner explained:

> When we are not clear, we ask the teacher or friend to repeat, paraphrase, explain, slow down or give examples. This helps us to understand what we learn. (Focus group 1, Chombo CDSS 8/09/2010)

It was revealed that inadequate knowledge of English made below learners tense and not free to ask questions. They feared being laughed at by fellow learners. Lack of understanding also made the below average learners not to ask many questions. The other reason was that many of them were not actively following the lesson.

Interviewing the learners who were not asking questions, both above and below average learners explained:

> *Kukhala opanda mafunso ndiye kuti palibe vuto, zamveka. Koma nthawi zina timasiya osafunsa kuopa kusokoneza maplan ndi nthawi kwa aphunzitsi komanso kuopa kwataitsa nthawi amene akutsatira bwinobwino. Tikakhala ndi vuto lalikulu timangokaonana nawo aphunzitsi kapena anzathu patokha.*
> (Lack of questions means there is no problem with the language task. Sometimes we reserve some questions to avoid disturbing the teachers' time plans and wasting time for those who follow the lesson. We just opt for meeting the teacher or friends privately if it is a serious clarification). (Focus group 2, Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Finding out from teachers about asking of questions, a teacher explained:

> The above average learners ask questions to understand the content. Sometimes they know the content but they ask when they see that the teacher is not prepared or has gone astray somewhere. This encourages teachers to prepare their work thoroughly resulting into improvement of the learning process. The below average do not ask questions in the classroom much because of their language deficit and they are free to ask outside in Chichewa. Sometimes they do not ask because of lack of understanding. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 18/09/2010)

Interviewing and observing teachers and learners revealed that there was a strong relationship between asking questions and performance because those who asked questions got the right information leading to high performance. The knowledgeable assisted the less knowledgeable ones. This is in line with Vygotsky's constructivist theory [1896-1934] (1962) which states that learning occurs in social groupings and that those who are more knowledgeable tend to help the less knowledgeable ones to become knowledgeable through scaffolding process.

4.5.2 *Cooperating with others*

Cooperating means working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information or model a language activity (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). This involves cooperating with peers and proficient users of English. With reference to Table 12 the sub-strategy of cooperating with others was used by 28 above average and 30 below average learners. This shows that the below average used it more highly than the above average ones. Finding out from teachers why the below average learners preferred cooperative learning more than the above average ones, it was revealed that the below average learners were not active and relied on the above average to find answers for them. However, one below average learner said:

> *Kuphunzira pamodzi pagulu kumatithandiza kwambiri chifukwa timaphunzira zambiri kuchokera kwa anzathu. Timaphunzira ndi kuchita* practise *bwino kuposanso tikakhala ndi aphunzitsi.* (Learning together in groups helps us very much because we learn a lot from friends. We ask and practice English better with friends than the teacher). (Chombo CDSS, 19/09/2010)

Although Vygotsky (1962) stressed that learning occurs in a social grouping, the study found a weak relationship between cooperating with others and performance. This was evidenced from the below average learners who liked it most but failed to reach the satisfactory levels of performance because they failed to learn meaningfully. They performed better in team work because of the above average learners. On their own, they failed to retrieve what they learnt during tests and examinations because it was the above average learners who were doing the work for them. For example, in group compositions the below average learners lacked self-efficacy and left everything in the hands of the

MALAWI COLLECTION

above average ones to write. Commenting on cooperative learning, one of the above average learners said:

> *Ndimakonda kuphunzira kwa gulu pa* speaking, listening *ndi reading pang'ono. Sindikonda kulemba kwa gulu pa ntchito yoti aphunzitsi akachonge monga note making ndi composition chifukwa ndimangolemba ndekha kapena awiri basi. Ena salemba nawo kapena kumvetsera. Amangofuna kulandira* marks *aulere. Nthawi zina gulu lathu limalephera chifukwa chosathadizana ndi kugwirizana.* (I like cooperative learning in speaking listening and partly reading. I do not like team writing on work which will be graded by the teacher especially note making and compositions because it is mostly done by one or two of us. The rest do not get involved to do the exercise or even to learn. Others like to get a free grade. Sometimes our group fails because of lack of effort to work together). (Dowe CDSS, 17/09/2010)

It was revealed that cooperative learning worked better in schools which had learners who were selected on merit than those schools whose learners just found places after failing the national examinations. This was because those selected on merit shared ideas and the knowledgeable assisted those who failed and less knowledgeable. In schools where learners who did not do very well were selected to (CDSSs), very few were knowledgeable to assist others. For example, in some groups, it was observed that no one was knowledgeable enough to assist others. This resulted into learners hating participatory learning and not being motivated to learn English. Because of the history of learner's examination failure at a particular school, many below average learners thought they failed because of the school they were at. In evidence of this, one teacher reported that their school (Chombo CDSS) was nicknamed *Nangantani* (what shall I do?) because it was only those parents who had no money for private schools who sent their learners at this school. This gave a chance to those who failed the national examinations to get

places in such schools resulting into an increase in the number of below average learners. Learners admitted to such schools lacked the motivation that they were going to succeed learning from the history of the school. Many groups could not assist each other because all were not knowledgeable. In the few groups with some knowledgeable learners, they were the ones who dominated and the other members were not active. The others were passive because the content was not of their level and they found it too difficult for them. Out of eight teachers, five reported that in schools with large classes, lack of resources and many below average learners, cooperative learning failed to achieve its goal. Samida (2004) states that co-operation with others eliminates competition and in its place brings group spirit. However, it was reported by teachers that most of the above average learners did not like cooperative learning because in the target schools there was a strong emphasis on competition. This is also in line with Jurkovic (2008) who found that learners who are successful rarely value cooperative learning. Commenting on cooperating with others, a teacher argued:

> The above average practice cooperative learning because they want to obey; it is one of the demands of the curriculum and because of the shortage of resources. They feel like being delayed to work in teams because they do not benefit anything from the below average who depend on them to perform without understanding. (Chombo secondary school, 15/09/2010)

Limited autonomy by the below average learners meant a lot of dependence from the teacher and peers. For example, during observation at Dowe secondary school, a learner who failed to answer a question was simultaneously given the correct answer in a whisper by a friend. In this case, it showed that cooperation impeded the below average learners from involving their mental processes seriously. Finally, the study found a weak

relationship between cooperating with others and performance because the below average ones who liked it most failed. Large classes, high number of incompetent learners, inadequate supervision from teachers among others made cooperative learning not to achieve its goals.

In summary of social strategies, the study found that learners used the social strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others. It was revealed that asking questions as a strategy enhanced performance. Cooperating with others failed to enhance performance because of the high number of below average learners in CDSSs, high competition among learners and large classes. Teachers have the duty of varying teaching methods to suit all learners' performance. Individual exercises should also be given after groups to make all learners involved.

4.6 Chapter summary

The chapter has analysed and discussed data that was sourced from secondary school teachers of English and form three learners. It has reported that English learners used language learning strategies of cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies and that there is a relationship between language strategy use and performance. The above average learners scored highly in the use of cognitive, meta-cognitive and asking questions as a social strategy. The below average learners used compensation, affective and cooperative strategies highly. The study found that all meta-cognitive strategies and cognitive strategies of practising, reviewing work done, note taking and summary and the social strategy of asking questions were highly related to

performance. Finally, it was also found that all compensation strategies, cognitive strategies of highlighting and rote memorisation and the social strategy of cooperating with others did not enhance high performance.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Chapter overview

The study investigated the language learning strategies used by learners and how they affected their performance. The key data sources were form three English language teachers and learners. The study involved learners and English teachers in four secondary schools in Zomba Urban. The study used constructivism and mainly the information processing model as a theoretical frame work.

The study was mainly responding to three research questions. These were about the language learning strategies used by learners, how they were used and how the strategies used affected their performance. These questions were answered in Chapter 4 through a comparison of above and below average learners' continuous assessment scores, performance during observation and the language learning strategies they used. This chapter presents the conclusions raised from the findings and makes recommendations which can assist in the teaching and learning of English in schools. Finally, it suggests the areas for further studies.

5.1 Key issues

The study found that many learners had difficulties in acquiring the necessary competences in English as a subject. This agrees with Mmela (2006) who also found that

learners had difficulties in learning English as a second language and many performed poorly. Although various studies have attributed the poor performance to a number of factors, the findings of this study illustrate that the problem also originated from how the learners go about learning, the efforts they put in or in other words, their use of language learning strategies affected their performance.

In response to the first and second research questions, both above and below average learners used cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, social and affective strategies. The study established that above average learners used special sub-strategies most and in an orchestrated manner. It means these strategies, for example, practising and management of study time were very important for learning and could be taught to the below average learners who thrived within the same contextual challenges with the above average but performed poorly. It also means that the difference between the above and below average students was how they managed their time. Many learners failed to be organised all along their education. They performed poorly or less than they could because they started being organised when examinations were near. Difficulty of the material to those who joined the secondary school level without passing well in the national examinations; procrastination and laziness hindered the below average learners from using cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. These were found highly related to performance. They mostly used the language learning strategies which had a weak relationship with performance. For example they used the strategies of relaxing and rote memorization. This means below average learners shunned strategies which highly involved their mental processes and managing their learning which are the most

important strategies in learning. In this study, the findings also mean that large classes, lack of proper planning, organization and supervision by teachers and strong emphasis on competition made cooperative learning which is a social strategy fail to achieve its goal of the knowledgeable assisting the less knowledgeable. This is not in line with constructivism which guides this study. The findings also illustrate that teachers used cooperative learning mainly to solve the problem of inadequate resources and to reduce their work especially during the marking of compositions. Some were not very much concerned about whether learning was taking place or not.

The results also meant that examinations posed obstacles when trying to integrate active learning or learner centred pedagogies into the classroom because more often than not these pedagogies which made learners practice different language learning strategies were seen as ineffective in preparing learners for passing examinations. Passing examinations was the priority for most learners and teachers. It was also found that because of the interest in passing examinations and not in learning, some above and below average learners and even teachers did not put a lot of effort on speaking and listening skills because they were not examined. They could not understand that these skills could indirectly help them pass examinations. The findings mean that most of the learners did not like speaking English. The status of English speaking was very poor. Some teachers also did not like speaking English to their learners as role models. Although some schools tried to force learners to communicate in English, only few mainly those with English speaking backgrounds spoke English satisfactorily.

In response to the third research question, the study established that there was a relationship between the strategies learners used; how they used them and their performance. The use of language learning strategies contributed to the difference between above and below average learners. This concurs with Fewell (2010) who by comparing high and low proficiency learners found that language learning strategies as a variable is a significant determinant of eventual success or failure in language learning. There was a causal reciprocal relationship between strategy use and language performance which indicates that strategy use and language performance are both causes and outcomes of each other. The study has revealed that improper use of language learning strategies is another cause of poor performance among English learners.

5.2 Recommendations

Language learning strategies are very important to learners because they help learners who use them meaningfully to become autonomous and communicatively competent. In view of this, this study makes the following recommendations:

- Teacher training institutions and teachers should reinforce language learning strategy training. There is need for teachers to understand what language learning strategies are how to train learners and which variables affect LLS choice and use. Learners should be trained on language learning strategies beginning at primary school in order to have a good background of how to learn which can result in boosting their performance.

- The Malawi government in conjunction with the Malawi National Examinations Board should consider introducing examinations which should be testing English in all the four language skills including listening and speaking as it was done in French language. This could encourage learners and English language teachers to take speaking and listening more seriously. This could also lead to our learners being more fluent in English.

- Education authorities should provide an enabling environment to facilitate the learning of English. Examples of the enabling environment could be resources and teacher to pupil ratio reduction. This could assist learners to use learner-centred teaching methods easily. These methods help learners to use different language learning strategies.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

- A comparative study on language learning strategies with the rural secondary schools could be carried out for comparison purposes.

- Detailed studies could also be carried out to study few language learning strategies and how they relate to performance at national level in order to come up with results which could be generalised.

REFERENCES

Abraham, R., & Van, R. (1990). Strategies of successful language learners. *TESOL Quarterly, 24(2), 223-234.*

Aijaz, M.S. (2001). *Learning achievement in primary schools of Pakistan: A quest for quality education.* Islamabad: UNESCO.

Arher, J.M., Holy, M.L., & Kasten, M.M. (2001). *Action research for teachers: Travelling the yellow brick road.* Columbus: Prentice Hall

Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your research project: A guide for first time researchers in education and social science* (2nd ed). Buckingham: Open University.

Bogdan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (1988).*Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed). Boston: Allen and Bacon Publishers.

Borg, W.R., & Gall, M.D. (1989). *Education research: An introduction* (5thed.). New York: Longman.

British Council, (1978). *Individualisation in language learning.* London: ETIC Publications.

Brooks, J., & Brooks, M. (1993). *In Search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms.* Alexandra: ASCD.

Cajkler, W., & Adelman, R. (2000). *The practice of foreign language teaching* (2nd ed.). London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Chagunda, A. (2000, August 12-18).Generation. *Malawi news,* 43 (2487), 4

Chamot, A.U. (2003). Issues in language learning strategy research and teaching. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 2004; 1,* (1): 14-26.

Chamot, A., & O'Malley, M. (1994). *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach.* Retrieved at auchamot @ gwu .edu on 15/02/2010.

Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). (Ed). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Chimombo, J.P.G. (2005). Quality versus quantity in education: Case studies in Malawi. *Journal of International review of education (2005)*; 51: 155- 172.

Chimombo, J. Kunje, D. Chimuzu, T., & Mchikoma, C. (2005). *A study conditions of schooling and quality of education in Malawi.* Zomba: The SACMEQ 11 Project in Malawi.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge Falmer.

Cohen, A.D. (1996). Second language learning and use of strategies: Clarifying issues. Minnesota: Minneapolis. Retrieved on 21/09/2011 at www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/resources/ sbiclarify.

Commonwealth Education Fund Strategic Plan for Malawi (2003-2005). Retrieved on 09/7/2009 at http://www.commonwealth education fund.org.

Cresswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research methods*. Oxford: How to Books Ltd.

Department of Research Evaluation & Policy studies Report (2009). *Baseline study on learning achievement of standard 3 and 7 learners in Malawi.* MIE: Domasi.

Diener, E., & Crandal, R. (1978). *Ethics in social and behavioural research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dzama, E.N. (2006). *Malawi secondary school learners' learning of science: Historical background, performance and beliefs.* (Unpublished PhD Thesis) Department of Education, University of Western Cape.

Ehrman, M., & Oxford, R.L. (1990). Adult language learning styles and strategies in an intensive training setting. *Modern language journal*; 74: 311-327.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford university press.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1985). *Strategies in inter-language communication.* New York: Longman Group Ltd.

Fewell, N. (2010). Language learning strategies and English language proficiency: An investigation of Japanese EFL university learners.*TESOL Journal, 159 (2), 159-174.*

Fidderholdt, (1998). Retrieved on19/01/10 from URL : http: // www.*Jalteducation.*

Frankiel, J.R., &Wallen, N.E. (2008). *How to design and evaluate research in education (7th ed).* New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Friends of Malawi, (2004). *Building ties between Malawi and America, one village at a time: Education.* Retrieved on14/04/2011 fromD:/friends of Malawi; About Malawian geography.mht

Harvey, P. (1985). A lesson to be learnt: Chinese approaches to language learning. *ELT Journal,39(3),* 183-186.

Jurkovic, V. (2008). *Language learner strategies and language competence: A case study in the Slovene Higher Education area.* (Unpublished doctoraldissertation). Ljubljana: Filozofska Fakulteta.

Kalong, R.A. (2008). *Code- switching.* Retrieved on 20/01/2012 at www.fp.utm.../pdf fail/...rebeccaidaApc040264D2008ttpS

Kholowa, F.A.C. (1999). *Between two worlds: Conflict between Malawi teachers' pedagogic paradigm and assessment needs of their context: How do they resolve*

it? (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of East Anglia.

Kishindo, E., Susuwele, W., Ndalama, L.,& Mwale, L.(2005).*Assessing learner achievement in English, Chichewa, mathematics and science in standards 3,5, and 7 in Malawian primary schools.* Domasi: Malawi.

Krashen, S.D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications.* New York: Longman.

Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd.

Lee, C.K. (2010). An overleaf of language learning strategies. *ERECLS,* 7, 132-152.

Lipenga, M. (2011). *Exploring the teaching methods and strategies that are used in primary schools for the development of language proficiency.* (Unpublished MEd dissertation). Zomba: University of Malawi.

Livingston, L. (1997). *Meta-cognition: An overview*. Retrieved on 10/09/2011 from http://www,gse.buffalo.edu/fus/shuel/cep564/metacog.htm.

Llurda, E. (2011). On competence, proficiency and communicative language ability. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 10(1), 2000 –85.

Magogwe, J., & Oliver, R. (2007). The Relationship between language learning: Botswana system. *An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied linguistics, 35, 338-352.*

Malawi Institute of Education, (2002). *Senior secondary school English Syllabus.* Zomba: Domasi.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Matiki, A. (2001). The Social Significance of English in Malawi. *World Englishes,* 20 (2), 201-218.

Mayer, R.E. (2004). "Should there be a three strikes rule against pure discovery learning?" *American psychologist 59 (1), 14-19.*

McKeachy, W.J. (1988). *The need for study strategy training.* Houghton: Mifflin company.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Case study research in deduction: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco CA: Jossey- Bass

Miller, G.A. (2003).The cognitive revolution: A historical perspective: *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 7, 141-145.

Miller, G.A. (1956). *The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information.* Retrieved on 11/09/2011 at http://www.well.com/user/smalin/miller.html

Mmela, E. (2006). *Implementing integrated literacy approaches in an English classroom in Malawi.*(Doctoral Thesis Presented to Polytechnic Institution 2006). Retrieved on 29/04/2012 at http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/mmelapdf.

MoEST, (2008). *National education sector Virginia plan (2008-2011)*. Lilongwe: Malawi.

Mullins, P. (1992). Successful English language learning strategies of students enrolled at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkom University, Bankok.Thailand: *Dissertation Abstracts International, 53 (6), 1829 A (UMI 9233758).*

Ngwira, N. (2010). An investigation of learning strategies in learning school biology. (Unpublished Master of Educationdissertation). Zomba: University of Malawi.

Nisbet, J., & Shucksmith, J. (1986). *Learningstrategies.* London: Routledge & Kegan Publications.

O'Malley, M., & Chamot, A.U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.* Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Ozel, A. (2009). The practice of information processing model in teaching of cognitive strategies. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, March 2009.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Presidential Committee on Quality Education (2000). *Quality of education final draft.* Lilongwe: Malawi.

Radwan, A.A. (2011). Effects of L2 proficiency and gender on choice of language learning strategies by university learners majoring in English. *Asian EFL Journal.* Retrieved on 14/09/2011 at http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/pdf/march-2011-aar.pdf.

Rossman, G.B., & Rallis, S.F. (2003). *Learning in the fields: Introduction to qualitative research.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Samida, D.K. (2004). *Language learning strategies.* Retrieved on 14/12/2011 at libro.do-bunkyodal.ac.jp/research/pdf/treatises05/01samidaa.pd.

Shmais, W.A. (2003). Language learning strategy use in Palestine. *TESL-EJ, 7(2), 1-17.*

Stern, H.H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, H.H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarone, E. (1977). Conscious communication strategies in inter-language: A progress report. *Tesol, 77,194-203.*

UNESCO. (2000).*The Dakar framework for action, education for all: Meeting our collective commitments.* Adopted by the World Education Forum Dakar, Senegal, 26-27 April, 2000 including six regional frameworks for action. France: UNESCO.

Vermont, H.D. (1996). Meta-cognitive, cognitive and affective aspects of learning styles and strategies: a phenomenological analysis. *Higher Education*, 31, (pp 25-50).Retrieved on 21 August2011from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447707.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press, retrieved on 10/03/2010 from http://.tip.psychology .html.

Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (1987). (Eds). *Learner strategies in language learning.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice- Hall International.

Wisker, G. (2008). *The post graduate Research Handbook.* (2nd ed). Basingstoke: Pal grave Macmillan.

Ya- ling –Wu, (2008). Language learning strategies used by students at different proficiency levels. *Asian EFL Journal.* Retrieved on 10/03/2012 from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com Dec._08_yhw.php

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for learners

1. What are your favourite subjects?

2. Which areas of English do you face a lot of challenges in?

3. Why is English an important subject to learn?

4. English being so important in Malawi, What do you do to overcome the problems you face in English?

- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading and comprehension
- vocabulary
- grammar

5. What do you do to show that you are responsible for your learning in and outside theclassroom?

6. You have mentioned different strategies you use to improve your performance in English. How does each of these help you?

7. How do the following affect the strategies you apply?

- Teacher
- your learning styles
- national examinations,
- experience
- motivation
- curriculum

8. How do you modify and increase your learning strategies?

9. How do teachers help in training you on how to learn the different language skills?

10. How do you plan and evaluate your language learning?How do these steps assist you?

11. Can you mention the strategies you use which do not foster language learning ?

12. Which interaction strategies foster or hinder good language learning strategies?

13. Do you set goals to solve your linguistic problems? If so give examples?

14. Which strategies make you become a successful learner?

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for teachers

1. What is the status quo of your learners' performance in English
2. Do you know some language learning strategies?
3. If yes, which ones do you know?
4. How did you know about these?
5. How do you integrate these language learning strategies in your teaching?
6. What language learning strategies do learners use in order to learn
   a. Listening
   b. Reading
   c .Speaking
   d. Writing
7. Which ones foster learning and which ones do not?
8. How do you help learners to acquire the right learning strategies?
9. How do learners take responsibility of their own learning?
10. What do you do to encourage autonomous learning?
11. What steps do you take to help the poor English language learners know how to learn?
12. What challenges do you face in training the learner how to use better language learning strategies

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Dowe CDSS teacher 2, on 06/09/2010

Researcher: How are you sir?

Teacher: I am fine and how are you?

Researcher: I am fine.

Researcher: First I should thank you for accepting to be interviewed. As I have already stated, feel free because everything will be confidential.

Researcher: What is the status quo of your learners' performance in English?

Respondent: Learners have difficulties to acquire the necessary competencies.

Researcher: What evidence do you have to show these difficulties?

Respondent: Today's learners are different from our time. Most of them fail to speak and write English and their compositions are disappointing.

Researcher: Do you know some language learning strategies?

Respondent: Yes I do remember some.

Researcher: Which ones do you remember?

Respondent: I remember Grammar Translation and Suggestopedia

Researcher: Yes, but these are the ones we teachers use to teach.

Researcher: As from the name Learning Strategies they are those steps learners use to learn. In other words, they are the steps learners take in order to learn a language.

Researcher: Can you give an example of what your learners do in order to perform well in English?

Respondent: Studying, being attentive, practising

Researcher: Yes these are what are in other's words called Language Learning Strategies others could be planning, making notes and guessing intelligently. Do yougive room for learners to use these strategies in your teaching?

Respondent: Yes but not quiet

Researcher: How?

Respondent: During teaching, attention is a must and all become attentive. This means it is there and very few disturb. Practising is there but not very successful because of the large number of learners – 100. Studying is there but they do not utilise it. We have a prep. period but they just make noise. It means the chance is given but learners fail to use it. As for guessing intelligently, we give them the chance during comprehension but many fail.

Researcher: What learning language strategies do learners use in order to learn?Or in other words what do learners do in order to learn the following language skills.

LISTENING

Respondent: They pay much attention and high concentration. When they have notunderstood, they ask for clarification immediately. They give feedback like nodding, head movement, facial gesture and eye contact. If you move to another place you move together by their eyes following. Others scribble short notes using skimming and scanning.

Researcher: Do their performance prove this serious listening?

Respondent: Only for the few. Others look attentive because they fear being punished and they just look as we are together. When it comes to questions, such learners fail. For example, those who are below average learners.

SPEAKING

Researcher: What do your learners do inorder to be good speakers?

Respondent: They are required to practice speaking but here the practice is minimal.

Researcher: Why do you think it is minimal?

Respondent: It is becauselearners are not exposed to English language speaking practice at an early age, for example, at nursery school and primary school. The other reason is that there is no enough time to practice speaking in the classroom with the large number of learners and the need to prepare them for examinations. Learners fail to speak because they are

shy and fear to make mistakes. The above average try and we do not over emphasize on their mistakes but we encourage them.

Researcher: Are those the only reasons why learners fail to practice English speaking?

Respondent: The other reason is that we teachers sometimes have a deficiency in English speaking.Fewcommunicate to the learners in English and mostly the English language teachers.

Researcher: Faced with this lack of practice what do you advice the learners do in order to keep on trying?

Respondent: We advice them that English is a Joker. They cannot pass without passing it.

Researcher: During speaking what do the learners do inorder to keep on trying?

Respondent: Some speak simple English and use simple English words. Others code switch where they see that they cannot continue. Others speak slowly so that they think and correct their language during their speaking. Others use gestures or rehearse what they are going to say. Many learners do not try but shun English speaking. For example, the belowaveragelearners fear going to the staff room because of their English deficiency.

WRITING

Researcher: What do learners do in order to be good writers?

Respondent: Learners practice writing. After imparting various writing skills like short story writing, the clever learners are on the fore front to practice.Others improve their writing by wide reading of materials like books, novels, newspapers. They do this to learn how the renowned writers write their work. The above average learners also use creativity and imagination. Others assist each other in groups. Some bring their work to their teachers, to correct them.

Researcher: You have only mentioned about the above average learners what about the below average?

Respondent: They also do the same but slowly and in a disorganised way.

Researcher: Can you explain clearly what the below average do inorder to learn writing skills.

Respondent: They practice writing but they produce poor work. They rely on others to get exercises right. They rarely work out on their own but like copying other people's ideas. They do not practice wide reading. Instead they read seriously or memorise when they hear about examinations. They fail to be creative and imaginative. Others do not hand in assignments.

Researcher: What do you do to encourage the below average to hand in their work?

Respondent: Some teachers punish them but with the size of the classes as you have seen, we do not make follow ups because it turns out to be a relief on the part of marking. We just make sure that the work is revised and they copy the right answers.

READING

Researcher: What do learners do in order to be good at reading?

Respondent: Learners survey, question, read, revise and recite (SQR3R method) a piece of readingbutsometimesit depends on the type of reading. When studying or reading an academic novel, they take notes and summaries of the text in order to understand and remember easily. After that they go to the answering questions related to the reading. It can be set questions according to the sub-topics or past test or examination papers. After that they evaluate their understanding and then go back to revise then recite.

Researcher: What do the learners do if it is a comprehension passage?

Respondent In every type of reading, learners' minds are active throughout. They cannot understand without concentration. When reading a passage, they apply a psycholinguistic process. That is to say they become active by bringing in their experience of the world in which they live to the story.

Researcher: Can you explain with an example on how they bring in these experiences?

Respondent: Readers think along with the writer. For example, we were reading a passage on early marriages. The learners liked the passage because they could easily relate to what happens in their society. They could ask themselves why thecharacters were behaving like that, what they could do if they were a character and if it was really practical.

Researcher: Are those the only strategies learners use during reading?

Respondent: As already said learners survey the passage, go to the questions section, read attentively then go back to answer the questions. In addition, learners

are able to analyse and evaluate events as a high order of bloom's taxonomy. They are also able to infer meanings of difficult words and imply from the context.

Researcher: I have seen that learners use different strategies inorder to perform successfully in English. You have told me that learners think, practice, take notes, memorise,code-switch, guess intelligently, shun communication, speak slowly, plan, pay attention, work together, ask questions, summarise and evaluate. I would like to know which ones of the language learning strategies aboveenhance performance and which ones do not and why. I will be asking you strategy by strategy.

Researcher: You said learners practice the four language skills. Does practiceenhance their performance?

Respondent: Practice enhances performance because the learners who practice and learn by doing perform highly. For example, practice in writing makes them have more knowledge and promote memory.

Researcher: What about note- taking and summarising

Respondent: Note taking and summarising enhances performance but only fewlearners know how to take notes and summaries. Many learners have problems to make notes and summaries but those who are intelligent know how to make them and are the successful.

Researcher: Does rote memorization enhance performance?

Respondent: Rote memorization enhances temporary performance.

Things which cannot be remembered through studying with understanding are memorized for the sake of the examinations and they forget them soonafter the examination.

Respondent: Can you give examples of such things? Which should be memorised?

Respondent: Learners increase their performance memorizing long lists and confusing grammar, for example, the order of adjectives in a noun phrase phrasal verbs and prepositions.

Researcher: Can we say rote memorization is the right strategy of learning?

Respondent: No, learners need to understand the material. This is done through working hard all the time. This strategy only helps when the learners especially the below average are stranded and examinations are near.

Researcher: Does it enhance high performance?

Respondent: No to those who rely on it but yes when accompanied with other strategies and if it is done only on confusing material.

Researcher: Does code-switching enhance performance?

Respondent: No

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because it is done during speaking which is not examined inMalawi.

Researcher: What about guessing intelligently as a strategy?

Respondent: Our learners fail to guess intelligently but they always guess wrongly.It can enhance learning because learners can understand the meaning of a passage or a speech through intelligent guessing of difficult word. At this school this strategy does not help them.

Researcher: You said some shun communication; does this behaviour enhanceperformance?

Respondent: No, because it hinders participation and learners learn better bydoing.

Researcher: Does speaking slowly enhance performance?

Respondent: No.

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because speaking is not examinable in Malawi.

Researcher: Does planning enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes. Planning their work helps them to be organised and getfocused. As learners advance, they are faced with a lot of work and without planning they lose focus.

Researcher: Does paying attention have a relationship with performance?

Respondent: Yes, because it is the first step in learning. If the material is received wrongly, the learner will not perform successfully.

Researcher: What about working together in groups?

Respondent: Itenhances performance when learners assist each other with understanding. In our case, most of our learners do not take these groups seriously. They copy from the knowledgeable without understanding. They do not participate. It does not enhance performance because it becomes a period of personal interactions especially to the below average. This normally happens because of the shortage of books and the size of the groups.

Researcher: What about asking questions, do they enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes, learners ask teachers and friend for clarification on what they did not understand. It is also a sign that learners had been following the lesson.

Researcher: Do learner's attitudes, feelings and emotions and values have any relationship with their performance?

Respondent: No, because such things are not examinable.

Researcher: If these attitudes, feelings and emotions are negative can their performance not get affected?

Respondent: Learners who are focused are not really affected. They can slightly affect their learning but not performance because they are not examinable. It is mainly the below average who feel tense when learning because they lack knowledge of the language. It slightly affects learning but we always counsel our learners.

Researcher: You said learners evaluate their learning does this help in improving their performance?

Respondent: Not really. Few compare their grades with the previous and adjust their efforts to improve. Others set goals to achieve in the next term, for example, to improve their position.

Researcher: Does evaluation enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes, to the few who use it because it encourages hardworking.

Researcher: We have exhausted the strategies which learners use but are there other actions on how learners take responsibility of their learning?

Respondent: They take responsibility of their own learning by being resourceful to urge their parents to buy them some books, photocopy important notes or borrow from friends. They also have the responsibility to make sure other fellow learners do not disturb them. They report to the authorities about those who make noise and teachers punish them.

Researcher: We have come to the end of the interview. But before we close, do you have any other comments or questions to ask?

Respondent: I do not have much to say only that these strategies can be integrated easily in our teaching if the Ministry can provide us with enough materials, teachers and motivating infrustructure. We fail to encourage these strategies because of shortage of books, large classes and our learners are not motivated to learn in dilapidated classrooms because of this some learners already have the mentality that they are at an institution where they cannot succeed. This lack of motivation hinders them from using the required strategies seriously.

Researcher: Thank you very much for your wonderful contribution.

Respondent: You are welcome Madam.

APPENDIX 4: Focus group discussion questions

1. Why is English an important subject to learn?
2. English being so motivating to learn, what do you do in order to be successful in

   a- speaking b- listening c- reading d-writing
3. In each language skill above, why do you use those strategies?
4. Among all the reasons for learners performing poorly in English, how do you as learners contribute to this poor performance?
6. How does learning by doing help you to be successful?
7. What challenges do you face in order to master the four language skills and how do you solve them?
8. Do you set goals to achieve during learning? If yes, give examples.
9. What do you do to remember what you learn?
10. How does socialising with teachers and friends improve your learning?
11. Do having poor relationships with classmates and teachers have any effect?
12. How do you make sure there is good relationship with teachers and classmates?
13. Do you plan your language learning? If yes, how?
14. How do you evaluate your learning?
16. What contextual challenges limit you in the use of some language learning strategies?
17. How do the external examinations, curriculum load and class size and teachers affect your choice of language learning strategies?

APPENDIX 5: Observation schedule

Date: ..... School: .....

Class: ..... Time: .....

Language skill observed within the lesson and strategies used:

Reading:

Listening:

Speaking:

Writing:

Other observations:

1. Learners' ability to remember and relate previous information
2. Interactions:
   a. Learner to learner
   b. Learner to teacher
3. Learners' emotions,attitudesand feelings for learning
4. Teacher's influence of some strategies
5. Learner involvement and motivation
6. The use of compensation strategies to overcome language limitations when speaking or writing
7. Self management strategies observed
8. Cognitive strategies observed (suchas practising,analysing, and reasoning, receiving and sending messages, taking notes and summarising).
9. Other behaviours by teachers and learners observed influencing the use of some strategies.

APPENDIX 6: A sample of learners' progress report (surnames removed for anonymity)

FORM 3, TERM 1, 2010

NAME	MID TERM1 %	TERMINAL TEST PAPER 1 %	TERMINAL TEST PAPER 2 %
Alinafe	60	61	58
Anne	49	55	51
Anne	22	31	36
Agness	47	51	52
Alinafe	39	32	35
Brenda	56	60	58
Brian	65	70	66
Catherine	68	66	65
Comfort	56	51	49
Calorine	30	33	22
Chiyanjano	58	60	46
Chifundo	49	51	52
Chimango	61	52	50
Cosmas	23	36	39
Chikondi	50	49	55
Dyna	31	35	22
Dorothy	30	41	45
Esther	15	26	19
Esnart	48	-	-
Fatsileni	38	39	26
Fulkani	31	32	30
Florence	69	66	67
Gelard	52	50	44
Gosanaiti	41	48	40
Hetherwick	66	72	69
Innocent	52	60	51
Joseph	21	11	16
Justice	38	39	40
John	40	44	52
Khama	-	30	45
Lawrence	60	65	58
Morine	55	-	60
Misheki	23	16	25
Mwadida	50	49	-
Manuel	51	30	33

Modesta	16	-	-
Mayamiko	45	39	50
Madalitso	56	38	50
Maris	65	70	71
Martha	19	23	38
Monica	-	-	-
Mcnight	40	45	51
Mwanyana	73	75	69
Oscar	43	41	50
Overton	11	40	38
Onani	51	50	48
Pemphero	66	65	72
Rose	18	21	33
Peter	31	21	40
Rally	68	65	68
Ruth	19	21	30
Regina	67	64	67
Sarah	52	58	49
Sylvester	71	65	65
Steven	19	30	33
Susan	66	68	71
Shareen	44	51	55
Siyileni	60	62	58
Takondwa	10	38	39
Tabitha	39	30	39
Trifonia	18	21	30
Victor	40	49	52
Vanessa	39	30	33
Veronica	11	21	26
Waomba	50	48	41
Yamikani	69	72	78

APPENDIX 7: Letter of permission to conduct a research at the south east education

Chancellor College,

P.O Box 280,

Zomba.

29 March, 2009.

The Education Divisional Manager,

South East Education Division,

Private Bag 48, Zomba.

Dear Sir,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN YOUR DIVISION.

I write to apply for permission to carry out a research involving teachers and learnersin your secondary schools.

I am a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School. I am pursuing a master's degree in education majoring in curriculum and teaching studies with a bias in language education. My area of interest is: Exploring language learning strategies used by learners and how they reflect their performance.

I look forward to your favourable considerations.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Michael Bayani.

APPENDIX 8: A sample letter to headteachers asking for permission to conduct a research in their secondary schools

Chancellor College,

P.O.Box 280,

Zomba.

20 March 2010.

The head teacher,

Masongola Secondary School,

South East Education Division,

Private Bag 48, Zomba.

Dear Sir/Madam,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I write to apply for permission to carry out a research involving form three teachers and learners at your school.

I am a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School. I am pursuing a master's degree in education majoring in curriculum and teaching studies with a bias in language education. My area of interest is: Exploring language learning strategies used by learners and how they reflect their performance. Attached are my letters of introduction and permission to carry out the research from South East Education Division.

I look forward to your favourable considerations.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Michael Bayani.

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
Department of Educational Foundations

PRINCIPAL
Prof. Chris Kamlongera., B.A., DipTEO., M.A., Ph.D

P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI
Tel: (265) 01 522 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: (265) 01 522 046
Email: edf@chanco.unima.mw.

Our Ref.: Edf/6/19
Your Ref.:

5th July, 2008

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCING CATHERINE MICHAEL BAYANI

I have the pleasure to introduce to you Catherine Michael Bayani, our M.Ed [Curriculum Studies] student in the faculty of Education. To fulfill some of the requirements for the program, Catherine is investigating "students' language learning strategies". She is now required to collect data for her thesis. I, therefore, write to kindly ask for your support towards her study as she collects the data and related literature.

I thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and support.

Dr. Bob Wajizigha Chulu
Lecturer in Psychometrics & Head, Educational Foundations Department

REF. NO. SEED/ADM/VOL. II/279

29th March, 2010

FROM : THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER,

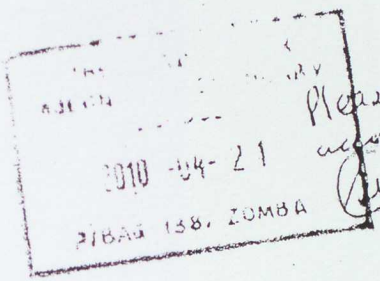
SOUTH EAST EDUCATION DIVISION,

PRIVATE BAG 48,

ZOMBA.

TO : THE HEADTEACHERS,

SEED SECONDARY SCHOOLS.



Please assist accordingly

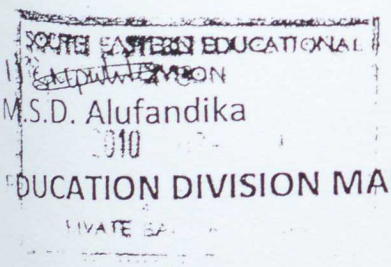
AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I write to kindly request your office to allow Ms Catherine Michael Bayani, to undertake research activities at your institutions.

Ms Catherine Bayani is a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School and currently she is pursuing her Master's degree in Education with the University of Malawi (Chancellor College).

I would be most grateful if Ms Bayani is given all the necessary support so that her research activities are carried out successfully.

I look forward to your usual support and hoping at the same time that you will accord this request, all the attention and urgency that it deserves.



M.S.D. Alufandika

EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER

INVESTIGATING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REFLECT THEIR PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF ZOMBA URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

MEd. (LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

CATHERINE SITILITHA MICHAEL BAYANI

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

MAY, 2014

MALAWI COLLECTION

INVESTIGATING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REFLECT THEIR PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF ZOMBA URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

M. ED (LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

By

CATHERINE SITILITHA MICHAEL BAYANI

B. Ed (Humanities) - University of Malawi

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIBRARY

Submitted to the Department Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Language Education)

University of Malawi

Chancellor College

May, 2014

DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

Catherine Sitilitha Michael Bayani

Full Legal Name

CSM Bayani

Signature

2 June 2014

Date

Chancellor College 31020001212977

MAL
275598
THE
568
BAY
2014

Certificate of Approval/Certification

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the learner's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature: _____ Date 30/05/14

Foster Kholowa, PhD (Senior Lecturer)

Main Supervisor

Signature: _____ Date 06/06/14

Mr Patrick Kapito, MA (Lecturer)

Member, Supervisory Committee



DEDICATION

To my late grandparents Mr and Mrs Mkwanda, my mother, E'Mary Nganisyo Kalipinde, and my brother, Geoffrey Michael Levi.

I thank you for bringing me up as a respectful and God-fearing woman and for labouring to get me educated under difficult social and economic circumstances. I also thank my sister, Mrs Martha Christopher Chingwalu, for your untimely support and love during the hard times I went through while I studied for this master's degree.

May God bless you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It could hardly be possible to come up with this thesis without the assistance and guidance from several sources. I do not take their efforts, sacrifice and patience for granted. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Foster Kholowa and Mr. Patrick Kapito for their tireless guidance in the work towards this dissertation even when things got out of hand. Your patience in reading and editing this long document and your encouragement inspired me to keep on forging ahead.

Second, I am also grateful to Dr Macloud Salanjira, Dr Symon Chiziwa, Dr Allan Lipenga and the entire Faculty of Education for the assistance and advice given during my writing of this dissertation.

Third, I would like to appreciate the contributions of Wisdom Murowa, Christopher Zambira, Dafren Muhamba and Frank Phiri Jr, for assisting me in computer hiccups and literacy and pestering them to go through my thesis for corrections.

Above all, I thank God for keeping me healthy during the period I was studying and guiding me on what to do when things got tough.

May God bless you all.

MALAWI COLLECTION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate language learning strategies used by secondary school learners and how they reflected their performance. The Learners' proficiency in the four English language skills in Malawian schools is still a challenge despite various efforts to ensure that learners acquire and develop proficiency in English. This has raised major concerns from various stakeholders considering the fact that English is the official language and a key to further education and employment. To achieve the above mentioned research goal, the study employed a qualitative research approach and used a phenomenological design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. The analysis of the data was done along with data collection by comparing data from different sources and tools and then developing themes and categories according to the theoretical framework and the main research questions.

The study concluded that although the learners' poor performance in English is attributed to a number of variables like large classes, unqualified teachers and home backgrounds, the way learners go about learning or the strategies they use also affect their performance. The learners used a variety of language learning strategies such as cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, social and affective in different degrees.

Through comparing the performance of above average and below average learners and the language learning strategies they used, the study found that cognitive strategies of practice, note-making and summary and reviewing; meta-cognitive strategies and the social strategy of asking questions enhanced performance. The above average learners who used them most highly also performed successfully. The cognitive strategies of rote memorization and highlighting; the social strategy of cooperating with others; compensation and affective strategies were found not enhancing performance. These were also the language learning strategies which the below average learners liked most leading to their failure.

This study makes two critical recommendations: Teachers must be conversant with different language learning strategies so that they can use them to assist learners attain skills and proficiency in English. Secondly, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should provide an enabling environment in all schools to facilitate the learning of English. Examples of the enabling environment could be provision of resources and minimizing large classes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

LIST OF OF TABLES ix

LIST OF APPENDICES x

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY 1

1.0 Chapter overview 1
1.1 Background to the study 1
1.2 Secondary school education in Malawi 3
1.3 The origin of the studies on language learning strategies 5
1.4 Statement of the problem 6
1.5 Purpose of Study 7
1.6 Key research question 7
1.6.1 Specific questions 7
1.7 Significance of the study 8
1.8 Limitations of the study 9
1.9 Definition of terms 9
1.10 Organization of the study 11
1.11 Chapter summary 11

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 12

2.0 Chapter Overview 12
2.1 The learning of English in Malawian schools 12
2.2 Language Learning Strategies definitions 16
2.3 Classification of language learning strategies (LLS) 18
2.3.1 Direct strategies 19
2.3.1.1 Cognitive strategies 19
2.3.1.2 Compensation strategies 20

2.3.2 Indirect strategies *21*
2.3.2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies *21*
2.3.2.2 Socio-affective strategies *22*
2.4 Importance of language learning strategies (LLS) *23*
2.5 Factors that influence strategy choice *24*
2.6 The relationship between language learning strategies use and learners' performance *27*
2.7 Learner training in language learning strategies *30*
2.8 Theoretical framework *31*
2.8.1 Constructivism *32*
2.8.2 The information processing model (IPM) *33*
2.8.3 Application of Vygotsky's theory on language learning strategies *35*
2.9 Chapter summary *36*

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 38

3.0 Chapter overview 38
3.1 Research design *38*
3.2 Selection of study site *39*
3.3 Sample population *39*
3.4 Data sources and sampling procedure *40*
3.5 Data collection *41*
3.5.1 In-depth interviews *41*
3.5.2 Focus group discussions *42*
3.5.3 Class observations *42*
3.6 Data management and analysis *43*
3.7 Piloting of the study *44*
3.8 Access negotiations *44*
3.9 Ethical issues *45*
3.10 Anonymity and confidentiality *45*
3.11 Enhancing credibility and authenticity of the study *45*
3.12 Chapter summary *46*

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 47

4.0 Chapter overview 47
4.1 Cognitive strategies used by secondary school English learners 47
4.1.1 Practising strategies *49*
4.1.1.1 Practice in listening and speaking *51*
4.1.1.2 Practice in English writing *55*
4.1.1.3 Practice in English reading and performance *58*

4.1.2 Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy.....60
4.1.2.1 Note taking and and summary.....61
4.1.2.2 Highlighting.....63
4.1.3Memorization.....65
4.1.3.1 Rote memorization.....67
4.1.3.2 Reviewing work done.....69
4.2 Compensation strategies used by secondary school learners.....71
4.2.1 Code-switching.....72
4.2.2 Delaying when speaking.....75
4.2.3 Avoiding communication partially or totally.....76
4.3 Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners.....78
4.3.1 Paying attention.....79
4.3.2 Organising and planning for one's learning.....82
4.3.2.1 Organising.....83
4.3.2.2 Finding out about their learning.....85
4.3.2.3 Setting goals and objectives.....88
4.3.3 Evaluating one's learning.....91
4.3.3.1 Self-monitoring.....92
4.3.3.2 Self-evaluation.....94
4.4 Affective strategies used by learners.....97
4.4.1 Lowering one's anxiety.....97
4.4.1.1 Knowing that they were not alone in their fears.....99
4.4.1.2 Using relaxation to lower their anxiety.....101
4.4.2 Taking one's emotional temperature.....103
4.4.2.1 Listening to one's body.....104
4.4.2.2 Discussing feelings with someone else.....106
4.5 Social strategies used by learners.....*108*
4.5.1 Asking questions.....109
4.5.2 Cooperating with others.....111
4.6 Chapter summary.....*114*

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....116

5.0 Chapter overview.....116
5.1 Key issues.....116
5.2 Recommendations.....119
5.3 Areas for further research.....120

REFERENCES.....121
APPENDICES.....130

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Cognitive strategies used by learners..... 48

Table 2: Practice as a cognitive strategy.....51

Table 3: Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy.....61

Table 4: Memorization as a sub- cognitive strategy.....66

Table 5: Compensation strategies used by learners.....72

Table 6: Metacognitive strategies used by learners 78

Table 7: Organising and planning as a meta-cognitive strategy.....82

Table 8: Evaluation as a meta-cognitive strategy.....91

Table 9: Affective strategies used by learners.....97

Table 10: Lowering anxiety as an affective strategy 98

Table 11: Taking emotional temperature as an affective strategy.....103

Table 12: Social strategies used by learners.....108

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for learners.....130

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for teachers.....132

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Dowe CDSS teacher 2, on 06/09/2010.....133

APPENDIX 4: Focus group discussion questions.....141

APPENDIX 5: Observation schedule.....142

APPENDIX 6: A sample of learners' progress report (surnames removed for anonymity).....143

APPENDIX 7: Letter of permission to conduct a research at the South East Education Division (SEED).....145

APPENDIX 8: A sample letter to head teachers asking for permission to conduct a research in their secondary schools.....146

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CDSS:	Community Day Secondary School
DEC:	Distance Education Centre
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
IPM:	Information Processing Model
LSS:	Language Learning strategies
MANEB:	Malawi National Examinations Board
MIE:	Malawi Institute of Education
MOEST:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MSCE:	Malawi School Certificate of Education
SEED:	South East Education Division
SQ3R:	Survey Question Read Review Recite
UDF:	United Democratic Front
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the basis for the entire thesis. It begins with the background of the study which is secondary school education in Malawi and the origin of the studies on language learning strategies. The second part gives the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, study limitations and the definition of terms.

1.1 Background to the study

Historically, the critical poor performance of both primary and secondary schools pupils in Malawi may have largely originated from the sudden declaration of the free primary education in 1994 which led to primary school enrolment almost doubling from 1.8 to 3.2 million between 1994 and 1997 (Presidential committee on quality education, 2000). This resulted in large classes, unqualified and insufficient teachers and inadequate resources (Chimombo, 2005; Commonwealth Education Fund Strategic Plan for Malawi, 2003-2005). In addition, these increased enrolments resulted in having large numbers of learners compared to the places which were available in secondary schools. To provide access to secondary school education, distance education centres (DECs) were renamed community day secondary schools (CDSSs) by the United Democratic Front (UDF) Government. This decision was made without much preparation in terms of ensuring that qualified teachers, infrastructure and learning materials were available and adequate

(Chimombo, 2005). The introduction of community day secondary schools therefore greatly contributed to the poor quality of education, low performance, increase in examination cheating and lack of motivation among these learners. The situation resulted in learners being unruly, disobedient, violent and unmotivated to learn and saw school rules and discipline measures as a violation of their freedom and human rights (Presidential committee on quality education, 2000).

Poor performance of learners remains a big challenge because although efforts are being made to slowly address some of these problems, many community day secondary schools (CDSSs) and few secondary schools still have large classes, unqualified teachers, poor infrastructure and insufficient teaching and learning materials. These challenges lead to teachers using non-participatory methods that lack room for practice and use of different learning strategies by learners.

In Malawi, English is taught in schools as a second language and it is also the official language of the country. It is the medium of instruction in education and a compulsory subject in all the schools (Matiki, 2001). English enjoys a high status in Malawi and generally, proficiency in English is one of the measurements of one's level of education (Matiki, 2001). However, a number of studies in Malawi have also shown that acquiring proficiency in English language in areas where it is a second language is a challenge. It has been revealed that many learners in Malawi face difficulties in learning English as a second language and many perform poorly (Matiki, 2001, & Presidential enquiry on quality education, 2000). Various studies have attributed the learners' poor performance to a number of factors such as teacher-pupil ratio, inadequate teacher training and lack of

appropriate teaching and learning materials (Department of Research, Evaluation, & Policy Studies Report, 2009; Chimombo, 2005). In Malawi, there is inadequate literature on how the learner's efforts and techniques to learning affect their performance and the language learning strategies they use to acquire competence in English. It is of great interest to find out from learners the strategies which they employ to learn and how such strategies affect their performance.

1.2 Secondary school education in Malawi

In Malawian government schools, a learner generally undergoes three levels: primary (eight years), secondary (four years) and tertiary levels of education. Secondary education is offered mainly through five types of schools which include grant aided, conventional, community day secondary schools, private schools and open distance learning schools. Grant aided secondary schools are high quality schools with adequate resources. Many are run by non-profitable organizations like church denominations but are government sponsored. Others are special government secondary schools found especially in every region of Malawi. It is where learners who perform very well at national level go to. Secondly, conventional secondary schools are government district secondary schools and learners selected to these schools are those who score high marks at district level. Community day secondary schools are schools where learners who did not score very highly during the national examinations are selected to. In these schools, those who just passed but were not selected because of low scores and those who completely failed easily find places. This leads to the enrolment being higher than the recommended of at least fifty students per class. In addition, these high enrolments lead

to classes having large numbers of below average learners. Private schools are those run by profit making owners and are expensive. Only those learners with well to do parents manage to go to these schools. Open distance schools which are also called night schools are those schools that are run in the secondary schools after normal classes. They are mainly for adults and those who dropped out or failed to get places at the secondary schools. The secondary level of education is divided into two sections which are junior (forms one to two) and senior (forms three to four). Transition from one section to another is determined by passing government national examinations with English proficiency serving as the final determiner for getting a pass score (Mmela, 2006).

Some of the objectives of secondary educationin Malawi are that learners develop effective communicative skills, apply problem solving techniques to new situations, develop good study skills necessary for intellectual growth and personal advancement and develop the spirit of inquiry and independent thinking (Malawi Institute of Education, 2002). Practically, these objectives are not achieved by many learners because of several factors including how they go about learning and the strategies they use. Vermont (1996) concurs that the learning activities that learners employ to a larger extent determine the quality of the learning outcome they achieve. By form one, learners are expected to be conversant in English. Secondary school instruction material and examinations are written in English (Friends of Malawi, 2004). However, Malawian school learner achievement in English is critically low (Mmela, 2006).

Many learners entering CDSS cannot understand English sufficiently to grasp the lessons. Thus it can be equally a challenge for learners to understand the questions in the examinations so as to answer them (Friends of Malawi, 2004).

In Malawi, the topic of language learning strategies is applied and appears in learners' textbooks especially after some units or chapters. However, to learners and some teachers, the word 'strategy' is not frequently mentioned. The common similar words used are learning tactics, techniques or learning how to learn. Consequently, learning strategy training may not be taken seriously as compared to other contexts where there is structured learner training within the curriculum. The investigation of learners' language learning strategies in Malawian Secondary schools might therefore reveal further causes of the poor performance by some learners.

1.3 The origin of the studies on language learning strategies

Literature on learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from concern with identifying the characteristics of effective learners. Research efforts concentrating on the "good language learner" had identified strategies reported by learners or observed in language learning situations that appear to contribute to learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). These studies noted that good language learners used more appropriate strategies to learn a language. They were flexible in their approach, had confidence in their learning ability, were motivated and expected to succeed in fulfilling their expectations. Successful learners tended to use learning strategies that were appropriate to the material, to the task, and to their own goals, needs, and stage of learning. (Celce- Murcia, 2001).

Researchers like Wenden and Rubin (1987) found that to improve competence, the below average learners could be helped to become effective by being trained on what expert or good language learners do. Wenden and Rubin (1987) concurs that it is assumed that once the strategies of the good language learner are identified, they can be made available and where useful, used by less successful learners to enable them to learn a foreign or second language more effectively.

However, later studies found that there was no single set of strategies always used by the good language learner. They found that less able learners used strategies randomly, in an unconnected and uncontrolled manner while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant systematic way at specific second language or foreign (L2) tasks (Abraham & Van, 1990; Chamot, 2003).

1.4 Statement of the problem

English occupies a central role in the socio-economic arena in Malawi. For instance, if one fails English he or she cannot obtain an academic certificate. This being the case, learners get more interested in passing examinations and ignore some important learning strategies necessary for language use in real contexts. A number of studies have revealed that learners in Malawi have difficulties in acquiring the necessary competencies in English language (Chimombo, Kunje, Chimuzu & Mchikoma 2005; Matiki, 2001). This situation affects both their ability to communicate effectively and their academic performance. A lot of factors have been said to contribute to English language failure, for example, lack of teaching and learning resources (Department of Research, Evaluation &

Policies report, 2009). However, it has been noted that in other schools where there are few resources, learners do perform well. In addition, in one school, other things being equal, some learners do better than others. Therefore, it is argued that it could not only be resources, differences in school factors, intelligence or teacher training that contribute to learning and competence as indicated by Aijaz (2001). Some individual and social attributes on the part of the learners are some of the contributing factors to the individual variations in the learning of English. Literature on language leaning calls such individual learning attributes to language learning, learning strategies. Wenden and Rubin (1987) concurs with the idea that some learners' success can be attributed to particular sets of cognitive, meta-cognitive and social behaviours which learners engage in. It is from this background this study aimed to investigate how the language learning strategies which English learners in secondary schools used affected their performance in English.

1.5 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the language learning strategies that learners used and how the use of such strategies reflected their performance in English.

1.6 Key research question

How do the language learning strategies which learners use affect their performance?

1.6.1 Specific questions

1. Which language learning strategies do learners use?
2. Howare these language learning strategies used?

3. What is the relationship between the language learning strategies learners use and their performance in English?

MALAWI COLLECTION

1.7 Significance of the study

There is very limited research on how learning strategies used by learners affect their performance in Malawian schools. Therefore, through learner training, this study will serve as one of the means of dealing with the serious problem of English language incompetence among learners. It will also serve to enrich our understanding of how learners learn English, how to respond to difficulties in learning and the insights we can gain from these. The study will also inform curriculum developers on the language strategies that Malawian learners use to learn English successfully so that the instructional materials they develop could contain activities and learning methodologies that could enhance effective learning. The study will also provide a missing link in research literature on the topic.

At a more practical level, the findings of this study could help university trainee teachers at training institutions to use those methodologies that supplement the language learning strategies used by learners in the classroom. Doing a research on learning strategies will help trainee teachers to fit well in the current language curriculum which encourages learner-centred activities and autonomous learning. This approach to teaching reinforces the use of many language learning strategies. The new teachers' knowledge from college will also help learners to know how to recognize the learning gaps in Malawian schools. It will also stimulate and encourage further research in the area.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in four schools in Zomba Urban. These were two boarding secondary schools and two community day secondary schools (CDSSs). The study proposed to interview four form three teachers per school but there were only two per school. This affected the study by reducing the number of participants. In addition, the study proposed to select above and below average learners with the assistance from teachers and progress reports starting from forms one to three. Some reports especially for the former years could not be found due to teachers' change of posting and learners who just joined the schools. Although these limitations might have had some implications for the outcomes of the study, the researcher made an effort to select learners who were above and below average using the available progress reports and the recommendations from teachers. These facts entail that the findings may not be generalized to the whole South East Education Division (SEED) or in the whole Malawi as a country. However, the findings of the study can be simply generalized within the context of the participating schools.

1.9 Definition of terms

The following terms are defined as follows in the context of this study:

Autonomy: It is the making of learning free from the bounds of any institution, and how the individual can reclaim control of and responsibility for his or her own education, while investigating the opportunities to learn from a variety of authentic sources. (British council, 1978, p.9).

Communicative competence: It is competence or ability to communicate. It concerns

both spoken and written language and all the four language skills.

Communicative competence has a comprehensive four part definition: grammatical competence or accuracy, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Oxford, 1990, p.7)

Communication strategies: They are techniques used by speakers when faced with some difficulty due to the fact that their communication ends outrun their communication means or when confronted with misunderstanding by a co-speaker (Faerch & Kasper, 1985).

Competence: Refers to what the learner knows (Chomsky, 1965; Llurda, 2011).

Foreign language: A language studied in an environment where it is not the primary vehicle for daily interaction and where input in that language is restricted (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Learning styles: Refers to the general approaches that learners use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject (Oxford, 1990).

Learning strategies: Steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1990).

Performance: What the learner actually does. It is a measure of results achieved and is concerned with learner ability (Chomsky, 1965).

Second language: A language studied in a setting where the language is the main vehicle of everyday communication (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

L2: Either a second or foreign language (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

1.10 Organization of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the problem. It presents the general background of the study stating the statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions and definition of operational terms. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and provides the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 comprises the research methodology. It explains the research design and how the data was analyzed with justification for methods used. It also explains the study site and sample of the study. Chapter 4 gives the results and discussion of the findings. It discusses what was observed and what it entails. Finally chapter 5 makes conclusions of the findings and recommendations of the study.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has given the background to the study which has also laid the basis of the whole thesis. It has further discussed secondary school education in Malawi, learner performance and the origin of studies in language learning strategies. In addition, a statement of the problem has been provided followed by the purpose of the study which includes the outline of the research questions that the study sought to explore. The chapter concludes by presenting the significance of the study to the field of teaching and learning, limitations and definition of terms.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of literature on language learning strategies which learners use and how they affect learners' performance. It begins by describing the learning of English in Malawian schools; defining and classifying language learning strategies; the motivation of using different language learning strategies (LLS); factors which influence learners in their choice of LLS and there after the relationship between language learning strategy use and performance and learner training are also discussed. Furthermore, the chapter discusses constructivism which is the theoretical framework that guides the study. As part of constructivism, the information processing model (IPM) is also discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses how the theoretical framework can be applied to LLS use.

2.1 The learning of English in Malawian schools

According to Matiki (2001), to many Malawians, economic success is predicted by one's ability to speak, read and write English. Many people throw in a lot of English words and phrases in their conversation when using vernacular languages. This means that the symbolic and attitudinal implication of English is greater than those of the indigenous languages (Matiki, 2001). This motivates learners in Malawi to make efforts to learn English but still performance in schools is not up to the standard (Department of

Research Evaluation & policy studies, 2009). The link between the declining standards in education in general and the poor performance in English in particular was made clear in recent consultative work for a Presidential Commission of Inquiry in the year 2000. The Commission noted that poor English skills both spoken and written were frequently cited by the stakeholders as indicators of the falling standards in education (Matiki, 2001). Furthermore, commenting on the 13% pass rate in the 1999/2000 Malawi School Certificate Examination (MSCE), one letter to the editor blamed the pervasive use of literal translations of Chichewa expressions into English by learners as indicators of the learners' lack of proficiency (Chagunda, 2000, p. 4). The above statements indicate that the issue of poor performance among learners especially in English originates from learners' poor background right from the primary school where it was not a priority for being promoted to the next class.

Kholowa (1999) did research concerning teaching and learning and examinations. He stipulated that research has shown that lack of competence in English among learners is a result of several factors but one of them is that learners are not given enough practice because teachers are more interested in teaching what is examinable than simply making pupils able to communicate. Satterly (1989) concurs that the pursuit of examination success has sometimes resulted in scanty attention to the need to show pupils how to learn (as cited in Kholowa, 1999, p. 29). For example, one of the participants in the Kholowa (1999) study said that if learners are left to work with little effort from the teacher, they will waste time on useless things outside the teaching syllabus which will lead to their failure during examinations. This statement is not in line with the Malawian

curricula which is learner-centred and expects the learners to take charge of their own learning. Examination oriented teaching and learning can hinder learners from life long learning. Learners need to take responsibility for their own learning while the teacher should be there as a facilitator and guide.

Dzama (2006) investigated the problem of poor performance in Science among learners in Malawian secondary schools. Apart from the lack of practice, he explains that learners are not involved in their own learning which contributes to poor performance among them. Furthermore, Dzama concluded that among the many causes of poor performance of learners in physical science, learners had limited knowledge of learning skills, lacked self control and had poor management of study time. Dzama added that learners mostly used strategies merely for reproducing class work with very shallow understanding resulting into poor performance. According to the researcher, Dzama's study was concerned with Physical Science only but most of his findings could also apply to why the learners' performances are low in the other subjects including English. For example, on the use of strategies merely for reproducing class work without seriously involving their mental processes to understand the content. Such learners become passive and believe that the teacher is the only knowledgeable. Learners' involvement helps them to understand and remember what they learn. Only the idea one has created by oneself leaves a mark on one's understanding that can be used on a later occasion. Involvement in one's learning is important and can make the learner easily apply what is learnt in real life situations outside the classroom.

MALAWI COLLECTION

Kishindo et al. (2005) conducted a research study on the learner achievement in Mathematics, English, science and Chichewa in Malawian primary schools in standards three, five, and seven. The results showed that in all the four subjects including English, less than 10% of the learners were adequately prepared for the upper class into which they were promoted to. Secondly, learner achievement in English was rated third highest with science having the least performance. Furthermore, research findings by UNESCO also concur that only a small proportion of children in Malawi are reaching the minimum required competencies and our education system is not performing to the standards we expect them (UNESCO, 2000, p.28). Related to the Kishindo et al. (2005) study, Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2008) study also showed that standard three learners performed relatively better in numeracy and mathematics but their performance in English was the lowest with a percentage mean of 5.79. MoEST (2008) also reported that one of the challenges to be addressed if the system of education is to improve in Malawi is poor learning achievement citing only 50% of learners passing end of cycle examinations.This poor background could cause learning problems for the whole school system because if learners' performance is poor in English but they still proceed to the next class where the language is more advanced, the situation worsens. This can lead to frustrations and lack of motivation.

Lipenga (2011) did research concerning the English teaching strategies and methods used in primary schools for the development of language proficiency. Among other things he found that learners were put in large groups of 10-12 learners per group. As a result there was a lot of noise which came about due to the large groups and failure by teachers to

control the learners. Lipenga's study also established that learners used Chichewa for discussions which defeated all the efforts to develop English language proficiency amongst learners. In his study, teachers stated that due to the large classes, they did not mind whether learners had understood and acquired the English language or not, provided they taught. This situation can also apply to some secondary schools in Malawi. The above sentiments indicate that some teachers contribute to their learners' low performance by lacking commitment to help learners use different learning strategies. They use group work because of lack of resources, to ease their work and not to allow learners to learn from each other through interaction. Groups which are not well organized and monitored can reduce learners' motivation to learn leading to disturbances and only few learners participating. The rest may use the group work time for chatting and writing exercises for other subjects.

2.2 Language learning strategies definitions

According to Oxford (1990), the word "strategy" comes from a Greek term 'strategia' which means steps or actions generals take for the purpose of winning a war. It is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose; the process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skilful way. Lee (2010) compares learning strategies to footballers who use tactics in order to win a game when they are in a stadium. With reference to learners, the definitions are based on the assumption that the learners plan and are consciously engaged in activities to achieve certain goals and they exercise a choice of procedures. They always think of the solutions or steps to take in order to solve the language problems they encounter during learning. Several authors have defined

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE - LIBRARY

language learning strategies (LLS). According to Oxford (1990), LLS are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques which learners use – often consciously- to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the second or foreign language (L2). They are actions taken by learners to control and improve their own learning. Strategies are tools for the self–directed involvement necessary for developing communication ability (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Faerch, Claus, and Casper (1983) define a learning strategy as an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Thus from the definitions, learning responsibility is more in the hands of the learner than the teacher. Even with the best teachers and methods, learners are the only ones who can actually do the learning. Furthermore, strategies are behaviours that are amenable to change. They can be modified or rejected and unfamiliar ones can be learnt (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.8). They are part of software and are flexible. That is, they are not always found in predictable sequences or in precise patterns. There is a great deal of individuality in the way learners choose, combine and sequence strategies (Oxford, 1990, p.13). From these characteristics, language learning strategies can change according to the task and choices of the learner on what works best. These variations contribute to the differences in their performance.

Learning strategies are related to learning styles because they both determine how well a learner will learn a language (Oxford, 1990). Celce-Murcia (2001) defines learning styles as an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills. They are different from learning strategies in that strategies vary widely within an individual, while styles are more constant and

predictable. To make it more clear, a learning style is the biological and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This shows that individual learning styles play a role in learners' choices of different learning strategies. Although these styles can be natural or developmental, teachers still have a role to encourage learners to switch to other styles which aid learning like combination of being visual, auditory and tactile.

2.3 Classification of language learning strategies (LLS)

Different authors have compiled learning strategies which vary in length, scope and terminology. Some are shorter and others longer but comprise more or less similar categories. According to Oxford (1990) and Cajkler and Addelman (2000), language learning strategies are grouped into two main groups. These are direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are grouped into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are grouped into meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Wenden and Rubin (1987) classified strategies into learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. There after, they classified LLS into three; cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Stern (1992) classified them into five: management and planning strategies, cognitive, communicative-experiential strategies, interpersonal strategies and affective strategies. In addition, Cohen's (1996) typology comprises retrieval, rehearsal, coping or cover and communication strategies. Below is a discussion of these different language learning strategies.

2.3.1 Direct strategies

Oxford (1990) defines direct strategies as those that involve the target language. She further states that all direct strategies require mental processes (p.37). Cajkler and Addelman (2000) call them language specific strategies. Examples of direct strategies are cognitive, memory and compensation strategies. These have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.3.1.1 Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations used in learning or problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation, synthesis of learning materials (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.23). They enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means (Oxford, 1990). Examples of cognitive strategies are rehearsal, organisation or grouping, inference and summarising (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Among the different authors, Oxford (1990) is the only one who included memory strategies in her typology. Cohen (1996) calls them retrieval strategies.

Memory strategies are sometimes called mnemonics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). They are strategies for the storage and retrieval of information. Thompson, a co-author in Wenden and Rubin (1987) states that it is difficult to think of any educational goal for which the ability to retain information is unimportant. The other authors, for example, Stern (1992); Wenden and Rubin (1987) included memory as a cognitive strategy. Although Oxford's classification is one of the latest and more detailed, the researcher concurs with the other authors like O'Malley and Chamot (1990) that memory strategies

could be included as part of cognitive strategies because mental processes are involved for one to remember and retrieve what she or he has learnt.

2.3.1.2 Compensation strategies

Compensation strategies are those that enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations of knowledge (Oxford, 1990). Stern (1992) calls them communicative – experiential strategies while Cohen (1996) calls them coping or cover strategies. Examples of these strategies are guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990). Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing includes code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication.

Code-switching means a phenomenon of changing from one language to another in the same discourse (Kalong, 2008). Code-switching seems to serve a significant communicative and cognitive function in a conversation. It plays the roles of facilitating, supporting and encouraging thinking and communication. Kalong (2008) states that code switching can both facilitate and hinder the learning of English. It can also be considered as a helpful method in the classroom as new content and new knowledge are able to be transmitted to the learners effectively. The statements do not specify the degree of code-switching and the stage of learners at which code-switching can be suitable. If it is too much it can lead to learners using less English words compared to Chichewa and missing the meaning of practising the target language. The use of code-switching in learning the target language may also lead to loss of fluency in the target language. The more frequent

learners use code-switching, the bigger the chance of them to face fluency loss in mastering the language. Furthermore, the over use of the native language may deprive learners of the needed input. Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Wenden and Rubin (1987) do not classify compensation strategies as language learning strategies. Instead they call them communication strategies. These authors do not recognise communication strategies as learning strategies because they believe communication is the output modality while learning is the input modality. In the researcher's opinion, what is important is that communication or compensation strategies, whether included as learning strategies or separated, aid in language learning as well. Each instance of second language use is an opportunity for more learning of the language.

2.3.2 Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies are those that contribute to learning indirectly. They are for the general management of learning. They support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language (Oxford, 1990). Cajkler and Addelman (2000) call them general private strategies. Examples of these strategies are meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). These have been discussed further below.

2.3.2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies

The word meta-cognitive means beyond, beside or within the cognitive (Oxford, 1990, p.136). Meta-cognitive strategies are those that involve thinking about the learning process, planning for the learning, monitoring of learning while it is taking place and self evaluation of learning after the learning activity (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). They are

MALAWI COLLECTION

actions used by learners for the general management of their learning (Oxford, 1990). Meta-cognitive strategies help to improve the organisation of learning time, self monitoring and self evaluation. It refers to higher order thinking that involves active control over the cognitive processes which influence learning (Livingston, 1997). Stern (1992) calls these strategies as management and planning strategies. This means they are associated with the learners' intention to direct their own learning. Examples of meta-cognitive strategies are paying attention, planning for the language task and self evaluation (Oxford, 1990). Thus language learners are often over whelmed by too much work like literature books to read, unfamiliar vocabulary and confusing rules. This can make them lose focus. Meta-cognitive strategies are important because their use help learners to regain their focus get organised and schedule their time.

2.3.2.2 Socio-affective strategies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) combine the social and affective strategies while other authors like Oxford (1990) separate them. The researcher suggests that it is better to separate social and affective strategies because although they both involve groups they are different. Social strategies are activities learners engage in which afford them opportunities to be exposed to and practise their knowledge (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Stern (1992) calls them interpersonal strategies. These strategies help the learner to ask for help from competent people and develop good classroom climate with good relationships (Oxford, 1990). Social strategies can be grouped into asking questions,

co-operating with others and empathising with others (Oxford, 1990). Thus, language is a form of behaviour. It is communication and communication occurs between and among people. Learners learn through interaction.

Furthermore, the term affective refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations and values. The affective part of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language success or failure. For example, if the learner does not like the culture of the target language, he or she cannot be motivated to learn. Some of the affective strategies are lowering ones anxiety and encouraging oneself (Oxford, 1990).

A large overlap exists among the strategy groups. For example, guessing is a communication strategy used to make up for the missing knowledge but also requires reasoning which is a cognitive strategy. Oxford (1990) also adds that there is no complete agreement on how many language learning strategies (LLS) exist and how they should be demarcated and categorised. This indicates that research on the taxonomy of language learning strategies is still underway. One strategy can belong to more than one group. For example, intelligent guessing can be a compensation strategy but at the same time a cognitive strategy. This is because for one to guess, mental processes are also applied.

2.4 Importance of language learning strategies (LLS)

Language learning strategies contribute to the main goal of communicative competence by helping learners' participation in authentic communication (Oxford, 1990). They give teachers valuable clues about how their learners plan and these help them to select

appropriate skills. Learning strategies simplify and make learning faster, more enjoyable and more self directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Learning becomes efficient and effective and learners become independent (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Prevatt (2006) states that determination of learning and study strategies can help to screen and identify learners at risk of poor performance; be used diagnostically to evaluate areas of difficulty and be useful in advising learners seeking a better awareness of their academic strengths and weaknesses (as cited in Ngwira, 2010, p. 2). The language learner builds up learner independence and autonomy whereby the learners can take control of their own learning (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Thus, the study of good language learner would also help good learners with a talent for languages to make the best possible use of their abilities. This shows that the use of appropriate strategies often results in improved achievement overall or in specific areas. Training learners to use learning strategies can help them become better language learners. From the above strengths, LLS are very important tools that promote active learning with the teacher as a facilitator.

2.5 Factors that influence strategy choice

Learners vary in the frequency and types of strategies they use. Many factors affect the choice of strategies. For example, the degree of awareness, task requirements, teacher expectation, sex, culture, general learning style, personality traits and motivation level (Oxford, 1990). The following is a discussion of some factors that influence learner choice of different LLS.

Firstly, the degree of awareness affects learners' choice of LLS. Learners who are more aware and more advanced seem to use better strategies than those who are not aware and less advanced (Oxford, 1990, p. 13). Higher level learners are more able to use strategies than the lower level learners. Research has found that less able learners use strategies in a random, unconnected and uncontrolled manner where as more effective learners show careful orchestration of strategies used in a systematic way.

Secondly, task type and requirement guides the strategy choice. Studies by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) found that learners reported using the highest frequency for vocabulary learning tasks and oral drills. The lowest frequencies were for listening comprehension, inference and making an oral presentation. The statements indicate that learners choose learning strategies depending on the task at hand. Learners would not use the same strategies for writing a composition as for bargaining in a shop.

Thirdly, teacher expectation also affects the learner's choice of LLS. The classroom instructional and testing methods strongly shape learner strategies. For instance, classroom emphasis on discrete-point grammar learning will result in the development of LLS like analysis and reasoning rather than more global strategies for communication (Oxford, 1990). The findings reveal that the teacher has a role to play in providing an environment which facilitates the use of those strategies which work best for learners. One way of doing this is by promoting the learner-centred methods of teaching.

Fourthly, the general learning style such as field dependence-independence, analytic-global orientation or the judging-perceiving mode has a strong effect on strategies learners use (Oxford, 1990). For example, a learner who is a visual learner may naturally use imagery as a preferred strategy.

Recent studies indicate that females may use a much wider or at least a wider range of strategies than males for language learning (Oxford, 1990). However, Radwan (2011) in his study of investigating language learning strategies (LLS) used by 128 learners majoring in English at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman found that there was no significant difference between male and female learners in the overall use of strategies. In the researcher's opinion, Oxford's study does not tell us at what stage females use better strategies than males and why. The same studies done indicating females using a wider range of strategies cannot be easily transferable to every context because of differences in cultural factors. In some cultures male learners dominate. Males and females can vary in the use of strategies according to stages and motivation.

In addition, nationality and ethnicity influences strategy use. According to Oxford (1990), Hispanics seem to use social strategies more than do other ethnic groups. Harvey (1985) also found that in China, culture contributed to learners' choice of LLS leading to using a lot of rote memorization strategies. Harvey (1985) also noted that quite a big number of English as Foreign Language (EFL) Chinese learners are not so called good language learners because they generally would not like to make inferences about the meanings of words or sentences, to pay too little attention to communication skills, being

corrected and concentrate largely on grammatical structures. Their choice of strategies originated from their culture in which diligence in learning had been greatly stressed and highly praised since the emergence of the ancient civil examination "Ke Ju." In order to obtain higher marks and step higher on the power ladder, candidates had to learn a lot of ancient classics by rote memorization.

Finally, Oxford (1990) states that more highly motivated learners use significantly greater range of strategies than do less motivated learners. Learners who have set goals to achieve will apply different strategies to succeed. For instance, individuals who want to learn a new language mainly for interpersonal communication will use different strategies than learners who want to learn a new language merely to fulfill a graduation requirement (Oxford, 1990). From the above discussion, motivation and goals set direct the quality of strategies which learners use. For example, a learner who has the goal of going to the university will differ in some choices of strategies with one who just aims at getting a certificate.

2.6 The relationship between language learning strategies use and learners' performance

Chomsky (1965) defined competence as what the learner knows and performance as what the learner actually does. In other words, performance is a measure of the results achieved and is concerned with learner ability. Celce-Murcia (2001) asserts that the use of LLS is demons ratably related to learner achievement proficiency and that in light of this remarkable association between LLS use and positive learning outcomes, it is not

surprising that learners who frequently employ learning strategies enjoy a higher level of efficacy which is perception of being effective learners.

In Botswana, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) explored the relationship between the use of preferred language learning strategies and proficiency. The findings reveal that Botswana learners do use language learning strategies and that there is a dynamic relationship between the use of LLS and proficiency. Related to this study, Ya-Ling Wu (2008) did a study in Taiwan. He found that higher proficiency English as a foreign language (EFL) learners use language learning strategies more than lower proficiency learners, especially cognitive, meta-cognitive and social strategies. On the other hand, there was no difference in the use of memory strategies between the higher and lower proficiency EFL learners. Regarding the relationship between LLS and English proficiency, Ya-Ling Wu found that cognitive strategies had the strongest influence. His findings also revealed that compensation strategies were most often used by EFL learners. From the discussions, all types of learners used memory strategies similarly because they were influenced by the looming examinations. The difference could be that the high proficiency learners used meaningful memory strategies and mixed them with other cognitive strategies in order to be successful.

Jurkovic (2008) conducted research on the correlation between competence and LLS use at University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. The study also found that the first strongest correlation was found between the frequency use of cognitive strategies and language competence. Ehirman and Oxford (1990) also conducted a study among 520 highly

educated native speakers of English, working for the United States administration bodies, on whether language progress correlates with the frequency use of cognitive strategies. Similar to Jarkovic, they also found that language progress most strongly correlates with the frequency use of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, Jurkovic (2008) concluded that the social negative correlation was because learners that had reached lower levels of language competence before enrolment in a tertiary education institution feel the need to cooperate with their peers and other users of English while the same need is absent amongst learners at a higher level of competence. Learners with higher levels of language competence also seem to be more aware of their needs and evaluate the progress they are making. The study does not tell us whether there was correlation between the use of meta-cognitive strategies and competence. In addition, there was no reason given why mainly the learners of higher levels used this strategy.

In another related study, Shmais (2003) did a study that involved 120 learners majoring in English in Palestine. He concluded that learners at higher levels of language competence are more aware of their learning needs and more frequently look for opportunities for learning themselves. On the other hand, the frequency of use of affective and social strategies seemed to be negatively correlated with language competence. Learners at higher levels of language competence used cognitive strategies more often and social and affective strategies less often than their less successful learners.

The different findings reveal that cognitive strategies enhance performance and that effective learners use those most. The negative correlation between affective and social

strategies and competence found by different authors indicate that learners at lower levels of language competence tend to be tenser and anxious when learning second or foreign languages which may hinder their learning process and thus lead to poor results. However, Mullins (1992) found that high level learners used compensation strategies most and it led to their high performance. The reason for variation in the findings could also be a result of differences in contexts. Jurkovic (2008) further states that it is not merely quantity but the quality of LLS. The results showed that there was a strong relationship between language learning strategy use and competence which possibly indicates that language progress can be enhanced through strategy instruction. In addition, Fewell (2010) did research in Japan on the relationship between LLS use and proficiency. In this study an English major group indicated the opposite. English proficiency level increased when LLS utilization decreased. In the researcher's opinion, this could be because of the Japanese learning system of emphasizing rote learning. Researchers have noted similarities in Asian learners adopting rote learning as a primary strategy and it could also be due to institutional constraints in emphasizing standardized testing.

2.7 Learner training in language learning strategies

Several authors like Wenden and Rubin (1987) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) found that in order to improve competence in learners, LLS can be taught. Researchers and teachers have provided instruction to how to use more relevant and more powerful learning strategies. Thus, being able to use the best strategies out of a carefully cultivated range does not always come by it self but learners need guidance on how to learn.

Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) state that if learning how to learn is introduced into the curriculum late, it can prove too late to be effective because learners would have already worked out for themselves the habits which they prefer. He adds that if learning to learn is to be achieved, the basic patterns should be laid down in early adolescence or perhaps earlier (1986, p. 94). The statements clearly explain why some of our learners fail to benefit from learning how to learn instructions. Learners can resist change of their old learning habits and beliefs. For example, the belief that knowledge can be simply given by the teacher while they are just passive. It is the role of the teachers to make it clear that the goal of strategy instruction is to supplant strategies that do not work and encourage those that work. For example, discouraging rote memorization and encouraging practice and reviewing their work.

According to McKeachy (1988), there is needed to train our learners how to study which is a meta-cognitive strategy. There are individual differences in the way learners study and it has been demonstrated that these differences in the study strategies are related to differences in achievement. " 'A' learners study in ways different from those of 'C' and 'D' learners," (McKeachy, 1988, p.3). The study does not clearly describe in detail how the 'A' learners study so that the 'C' and 'D' learners can be taught. Obviously they can be taught to be organized and avoid procrastination in fulfilling schedules.

2.8 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the social constructivist theory by Levy Vygotsky [1896-1934] (1962). Within constructivism, the study also followed the information processing model

2.8.1 Constructivism

The term constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves. Each learner individually and socially constructs meaning, as he or she learns (Vygotsky, 1962). Constructing meaning is learning. Learning therefore implies the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. Vygotsky's theory of learning states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, logical memory and to the formation of concepts. The theory rests on two key assumptions that learning occurs in a social grouping and that those who are more knowledgeable tended to help the less knowledgeable ones to become knowledgeable through the scaffolding process. Miller (2003) adds that learners working in teams under the guidance of the teacher will, according to this view, more easily discover and comprehend difficult concepts if they can talk to each other about the problems. Vygotsky insisted on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge.

The most significant bases of social constructivist theory were laid by Vygotsky (1962) in his theory of the "Zone of proximal development" (ZPD). "Proximal" simply means "next". He observed that when children were tested on tasks on their own, they rarely did as well as when they were working in collaboration with an adult (Vygotsky, 1962). When learning English, there is need for teachers to set up cooperative learning

arrangements among groups of learners with different levels of ability in order to make the low performers discover from the high performers.

However, some cognitive scientists and other educators like Mayer (2004), question the effectiveness of constructivism towards instructional design. He argues that little empirical evidence exists to support "learning by doing" given novice learners. Mayer further argues that novices do not possess the underlying mental model or schemas necessary for pure discovery learning where as learners discover for themselves. Hence, guided discovery is recommended (Mayer, 2004). In addition, he also argues on constructivism's insisting of change of control from the teacher to the learner.

Educational psychologists with their foundations in behavioral psychology have sought to design programs in such a way that learners would be enticed to achieve specified objectives. Constructivists have said that this violates both what we know now and the nature of knowledge. They have claimed that objectives should be negotiated with learners based on their felt needs, which programmed activities should emerge from within the contexts of their livedworlds.

2.8.2 The Information Processing Model (IPM)

Within constructivism, the information processing model developed by Miller (1956) explains better about language learning and strategies. According to this model, learning strategies means to know what to learn, how to learn and to form and direct one's own learning (Miller, 2003). Learning strategies are known as individual methods that aim to

increase the information process quality of learners and include mental operations that can be used by learners and be taught by teachers. According to Miller (1956), the main factors of this theory are about perception, thinking, learning, memory, attention, creativity and reasoning. Ozel (2009) stipulates that in the Information Processing model, the focal point is the individual and his living space. The individual's bio genetic potential, his mind of habit prone to develop his potential and his social interaction field are identifiers of both his learning and his learning forms.

The Information processing model that is meaningful according to an individual in this context looks for answers to the following four questions: *How is new information taken from outside? How is the new information processed? How is information stored in the long term memory? How is the stored information recalled?*

This process is a mental process that includes information storage and cognitive activities that provides the transferring of the information between memories. These are the sensory register composed of sensory organs like eyes and ears through which we receive information about our surroundings; the working memory or short term memory where information is temporarily held so that it may be discarded or transferred to the long term memory. The model likens the thinking process to how a computer works. The human mind takes in information, organises and stores it to be retrieved at a later time. These ways are determined with the formation coding and organisations in a certain directory in short term memory in order to store information in long term memory. According to Ozel (2009), at this point individual learning strategies that will create meaningful learning forms appear. These processes that simplify the learning of the learners and directly

shape their learning activities are key mental forms that are routines of learners. In humans, the results of IPM are exhibited through behaviour or actions- facial expression, a reply to a question or movement.

2.8.3 Application of Vygotsky's Theory on language learning strategies

Firstly, the social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1962) emphasizes social interaction as important in the development of competence during learning. This being the case teachers must encourage social interaction to maximise competence in all the four language skills. Language learning strategies fulfil this interaction under social and affective strategies. The learner uses social strategies when he interacts with the knowledgeable like the teacher and peers in pairs or groups. The learner interacts to ask questions; cooperates with others and develops empathy with others. In order to manage social activities and become motivated, learners also need affective strategies like lowering their anxiety, encouraging themselves and taking their emotional temperature.

Secondly, the theory stresses on assisting learners to learn in order to improve their competence. In Vygotsky's theory, this is called 'the Zone of Proximal Development.' Through working in teams under the guidance of the teachers, learners will more easily discover and comprehend difficult concepts if they can talk with each other about the problems. In relation to this notion, literature on second language learning states that language learning strategies can be taught in order to help learners develop competence (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Learners are supposed to be guided and assisted to refine the strategies that they already know and be trained in those they are not aware of. They are

also supposed to be monitored to check if the training has improved how they learn and their competence. Thirdly, the theory views learning as an active process and insist on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge individually and socially during learning. This indicates that the road to knowledge is always under construction. For the learner to be competent in language learning, there is need for the individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just to memorise the right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning. The theory views learning as an active process with active practice and review that leads to the greatest retention of knowledge. One of the general characteristics of constructivism is encouragement and acceptance of the learner's autonomy and initiative (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p.103). This view is related to the study of LLS in that it also aims at achieving an autonomous learner (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.8). Autonomy can be enhanced through being active to use memory strategies to remember, cognitive strategies to think, practice and construct knowledge, compensation strategies to guess intelligently and overcome limitations when practising the target language. Learners also become active and autonomous when they apply meta-cognitive strategies to plan, monitor and problem-solve and evaluate their knowledge construction while learning.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter has reviewed related literature from different authors. It has discussed the English learning situation in Malawi, the definition and classification of language learning strategies and the motivation for using them, factors that affect LLS choice and how the learners' use of different LLS affects their performance. Finally, it has discussed

the constructivist theory mainly from the Information Processing Model perspective. The next chapter discusses the research methodology used to come up with the findings.

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the research design and the data collection methods that were used to conduct the study. It also discusses how respondents were selected and ways in which the data collected was analysed. Ethical considerations taken are also presented.

3.1 Research design

The study was mainly guided by a qualitative approach. However, quantitative approach was slightly used to interpret some data in figures where necessary. Qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences and attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants (Dawson, 2002). Frankiel and Wallen (2008) state that qualitative data is detailed with thick description, inquiry in-depth, direct quotations capturing people's perspectives and experiences. The study mostly employed a qualitative research approach because it was exploratory in nature and that issues under investigation demanded prolonged engagement with respondents so as to understand their experiences. It aimed at learning some facets of the world in detail.

Within the qualitative approach, the study used a phenomenological design. Patton (2002) stipulates that a phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of

MALAWI COLLECTION

what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. In phenomenology, the researcher hopes to gain some insight into the world of his or her participants and to describe their perceptions and reactions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Phenomenologist believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality and reality is consequently socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1988). This approach was chosen because of the nature of the study. The researcher wanted to carefully and thoroughly capture and describe how the strategies learners used affected their performance in English. The study endeavored to provide a thick description of the situation at the identified secondary schools so that the findings might have the potential of applicability in other settings.

3.2 Selection of study site

The study was conducted in the city of Zomba which falls under the South East Education Division (SEED) in the Ministry of Education of Malawi. Zomba City was selected because it was closer to the researcher's home in which case the schools were easily accessible. This made the research to be conducted without much economic stress. Creswell (2003) concurs by stating that studying one's backyard provides easy access to informants and information at a minimal cost.

3.3 Sample population

Within Zomba Urban, four secondary schools were purposefully selected in terms of resource availability, day and boarding, sex composition, among others. This concurs

with Merriam (1998) who stipulates that purposeful sampling entails the selection of a sample from which one can learn the most to gain understanding and insight. Two of the secondary schools were boarding schools while the other two were community day secondary schools (CDSSs). These two different types of secondary schools were chosen in order to have the correct information about the language learning strategies used by Zomba urban learners.

3.4 Data sources and sampling procedure

Data was collected from teachers of English teaching in form three and form three learners. In total, the study involved eight teachers and ninty six learners. This means the overall sample was one hundred and four. The sample was purposefully selected. Form three teachers were selected because they would have more to say about the form three learners than teachers from other classes. Teachers were required to assist in the selection of above and below average learners. The study selected below and above average learners basing on their teachers' recommendations and with reference to their progress reports in English starting from form one. (Refer sample in Appendix 6). Those who scored 65% and above in every test were rated as above average learners and those who scored below 40% were rated as below average learners. These teachers were also included in order for the researcher to have different sources of information on the strategies their learners used and how they affected their performance. In addition, one form three class per school was selected. Two schools had three streams for form three while the remaining two schools had one stream. Random sampling selection was employed in the schools with more than one stream. The form three classes were selected

because they were more experienced to secondary school survival than the form ones and that they were not examination classes. At the time of the study, other classes were busy preparing for examinations and involving them in such a study could have been difficult as they would be less interested.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection took a period of two and half months. It was conducted in the second and third term of the 2010 school calendar. It started on 7 July 2010 up to 3 October 2010 with a break of two weeks during the end of second term holidays. The methods of data collection were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and class observations.

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

The interview method was chosen because, "an interview is a useful way to get a large amount of data quickly," (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.108). Within the one form three class selected at each school, eight learners were interviewed individually. Four best learners and four below average learners were involved. These learners were selected purposefully by the researcher based on their progress reports (see sample on appendix 6) and with help from their teachers. This gave a total sample of thirty two learners and eight teachers to be interviewed individually making a total of forty interviewees. The results were recorded in a diary. However, Bell (1993) states that interviews are highly subjective techniques and therefore there is the danger of bias. This is why a variety of methods were used for triangulation purposes.

3.5.2 Focus group discussions

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 324) define a focus group interview as a group interview where a moderator seeks to focus the group discussion on specific themes of research interest. These may be called discussion groups or group interviews. Focus groups discussions were used inorder to make participants offer additional comments beyond what they originally had to say once they hear the other responses (Frankiel & Wallen, 2009). However, in focus groups, some people may be uncomfortable in a group setting and nervous about speaking in front of others. Not everyone can contribute and other people may contaminate an individual's views (Dawson, 2002, p. 29). To overcome this in this study, learners were advised to respect each other's views.

Within form three classes selected at each school, the study used two focus groups per school making a total of eight focus groups of eight learners each. In total, the focus groups involved a sample of 64 learners. Each focus group consisted of four above average learners, and four below average learners. The results were audio tape recorded and later transcribed. In both interviews and focus group discussions, the issue of gender was considered. The sample comprised both male and female learners in order to compare how they used different language learning strategies.

3.5.3 Class observations

According to Wisker (2008), observation is a way of gathering data by watching behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting. Observation enables the researcher to capture what people actually do rather than what they say they

do (p.203). The total sample of one hundred and four was also observed. In order to follow research ethics, the observation was overt. That is to say everyone knew that he or she was being observed. The justification for choosing this method is that observational data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. However, people behave differently when they know that they are being observed ending up making the results biased. In this study, this was overcome by piloting the instruments and the repetition of the process. Each class was observed for four times. Every observation took one class period of about forty minutes. This gave a total of four class periods to be observed per school and a total of sixteen observations throughout the study.

3.6 Data management and analysis

Data analysis began as soon data collection started. It was an ongoing process which was carried out along side data collection (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As suggested by Arher et al. (2007), data collection and data analysis are parallel activities in qualitative research. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious and overwhelming in terms of the large volume of the material that needs to be processed. The analysis began by cleaning the data to make it clear and well understood. It was read over and over and there were comparisons between data from learners and teachers' interviews and observations. All these steps helped to identify themes and categories. The data was then finally analyzed according to the theoretical framework and the main research questions.

3.7 Piloting of the study

Before the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted at Masongola secondary school within Zomba urban. This was to find out if the planned time line was feasible and whether or not the interview questions and the observation schedule were appropriate and effective (Dawson, 2002). It was revealed from the pilot study that some questions were ambiguous and participants were not comfortable with some English words. For example, learners and some teachers could not understand the word "strategies." The questions were then adjusted and rephrased in preparation for the actual research in order for participants to come out with the required results.

3.8 Access negotiations

Prior to the commencement of the data collection process, the researcher sought for a letter of introduction from the Department of Education Foundations at Chancellor College. The letter was attached to the letters from Ministry of Education and the Division Manager for the South East Education Division (SEED). These permission letters were used when asking for permission to collect data in the selected secondary schools. This is in line with Bell (1993), who states that permission to carry out an investigation must be sought at an early stage. "As soon as you have an agreed project outline and have read enough to convince yourself that the topic is feasible, it is advisable to make a formal written approach to the organizations and individuals concerned outlining your plans,"(Bell,1993, p.47). Copies of letters of permission were also sent to all head teachers of the selected schools and in addition, verbal permission was sought from teachers and learners.

3.9 Ethical issues

Ethical standards were maintained all the time. There was informed consent which Diener and Crandal (1978) define as the procedures in which individuals choose whether or not to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would likely to influence their decisions. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study in advance so as to gain informed consent. Respondents were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study.

3.10 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participants were assured of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the information they were to provide. For anonymity sake, participants were assured that there would be no names recorded but instead letter codes would be used for each respondent. Furthermore, the four schools were given fictitious names as Aliko, Bomba, Chombo and Dowe. This concurs with Borg and Gall (1989) who stipulates that confidentiality must be further protected by not using names of individuals in any publications that result from a research project. They were also assured that the information obtained would be kept confidential and sorely for academic purposes.

3.11 Enhancing credibility and authenticity of the study

To ensure credibility and authenticity of the study, the researcher made use of critical friends at various stages of the study such as proposal writing, instrumentation and findings. Triangulation of methods and sites also helped to enhance reliability and validity. This included the application of different methods like interviews, focus groups,

and observation. Triangulation was also applied by involving different schools, classes and teachers. The researcher is a teacher in South East Education Division and made sure that this would not affect the study negatively by applying phenomenological suspension or bracketing. This was in line with Silverman (2005) who states that the researcher brackets his or her experience with the phenomenon by explaining his or her experiences with and positions on the phenomenon. Direct quotations from respondents were also used to show the authenticity of the study.

3.12 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed the methodological framework that was used in the study. The general approach and data collection methods and how the data was analysed have been included in the chapter. Furthermore, ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study which are pertinent when doing research have been highlighted as well. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to each research question. The purpose of this study was to find out the language learning strategies learners used in English and how these were reflected in their performance. Performance in this study meant the ability of the learner to do well in class exercises, tests and examinations. The strong or weak relationship between language learning strategies and performance was found through comparing above average and below average learners and the language learning strategies they used. As discussed in Chapter 3, learners were classified based on continuous assessment and their end of term tests as below average (below 40%) and above average (65% and above). This chapter is divided into six sections. The first five sections present and discuss findings on each of the five language learning strategies learners were using and how they related with performance. These are cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies. The chapter ends with a summary of key issues.

4.1 Cognitive strategies used by secondary school English learners

The study found that learners used cognitive strategies. They used their mental processes to analyze, remember and synthesise language issues. They were also able to solve language problems and transferred what they learnt to new situations. Some cognitive

language learning strategies were found to be related to performance while others were not. Table 1 shows a summary of the cognitive strategies used by learners.

Table 1: Cognitive strategies used by learners

Cognitive strategies Used	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Practice	43	24
Creating structure for input and output	43	15
Memory	33	30

Out of Oxford's (1990) typology, learners used cognitive language learning strategies of practising, creating structure for input and output and memory. In all the types of cognitive strategies, the number of below average learners who used these strategies was low compared to the above average learners who used them highly. This concurs with Jurkovic, (2008) who found that learners at higher levels of language competence use cognitive strategies more often.

According to Table 1, creating structure for input and output as cognitive strategies were the lowest used by the below average learners. Only 15 out of 48 below average learners used them. The use of cognitive strategies by the below average learners was higher under memorization where 30 below average learners used it. This is because many scored highly under rote memorization as a set of cognitive strategies. The researcher suggests that this could be the reason why such learners were only able to reproduce the class work without understanding. Rote memorization only assisted them to answer the

low order questions resulting into poor performance. The relationship between cognitive sub-strategies and their sets and performance have been discussed further, in the following sections.

4.1.1 Practising strategies

Practice in this case simply means learning by doing the four language skills regularly. With reference to Table 1, more above average learners frequently used practice than the below average learners. That is, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 42 above average and 24 below average learners reported that they practised the English four language skills. Learners were also observed practising the target language. Teachers reported that the inadequate practice by the below average learners was because they were deficient in their knowledge of English which made them inactive in the classroom. Out of the 8 teachers interviewed, 2 reported that some learners were not active because of their beliefs about learning. Learners and mostly the below average had the belief that in the classroom the teacher should be the one dominating and explaining and not leaving them to learn on their own. Asking a below average learner why he was not active in a group, he explained:

> *Ndinabwera kudzaphunzira chifukwa ndine wosadziwa. Pa chifukwa chimenechi sindingathe kuyankha mafunso ndi kuchita zinthu ndekha popanda kuyamba kuphunzitsidwa. Aphunzitsi athu amakonda kutifunsa kuti tikambirane mafunso ovuta asanayambe ndi kuphunzitsa komwe.* (I came to school to learn because I don't know and that is why I cannot find out answers on my own without being taught. Our teacher is fond of asking us to discuss difficult questions before teaching). (Focus group1, Chombo CDSS, 17/08/2010)

The above statements indicate that such learners have a negative attitude with participatory learning. Such being the case they need to be sensitized that practice is the best way to learn a language. Furthermore, interviewing teachers and learners, it was revealed that learners who practiced the four language skills more frequently also performed highly. Commenting on the importance of practice, one teacher explained:

> Practice enhances good performance because learners remember more what they do themselves than what they see and hear. If you observed correctly, most of the learners who performed poorly were those who were not active during practice time, spoke Chichewa in the groups, were writing notes from other subjects while their friends were doing different tasks and in the end they just copied what was discussed and the exercises from friends for marking. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 7/09/2010)

The above statement suggests that the above average learners performed highly because of their efforts to practice in the four language skills. Commenting on practice as a learning strategy, one above average learner said:

> *Ndimayesetsa kuchita chirichonse chimene aphunzitsi atiuza kuti tichite mozipereka, ndi mtima wonse, pandekha kapena mmagulu. Ndimachita practice kuyankhula kumvetsera ndi kulemba mkalasi ndi kunja komwe kuti ndidziwe chingerezi.* (I make sure that I put all my efforts on whatever we are asked to do by the teacher be it in groups or individually. I practice speaking, listening, writing and reading in and outside classroom in order to know English). (Learner 2, Aliko Secondary School, 14/09/2010)

This indicated that practice enhanced performance in the above average learners. This was unlike the below average learners who believed that they would learn only by the teacher predominantly telling them. The findings about the practice of English using the four language skills have further been discussed in Table 2 and the following sections.

Table 2: Practice as a cognitive strategy

Below average Learners out of 48	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Speaking and listening practice	43	18
Writing practice	42	30
Reading practice	44	24

With reference to Table 2, learners used the sub cognitive strategy of practice in speaking, writing, reading and listening. In all the sub-strategies, the study noted differences between the uses of practice strategies. The number of above average learners who used them was very high compared to those below average and the reasons have been given according to each set of strategies. The lowest strategy used by the below average learners was speaking. Only 18 learners out of 48 practiced speaking. The study found a strong relationship between each practising set and performance. These have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

4.1.1.1 Practice in listening and speaking

Through observation and interviews, the study found that learners used the listening and speaking practice strategy. From Table 2, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 43 above average and 18 below average learners used listening and speeking practice as a learning strategy. This shows that the above average learners practiced speaking more frequently than the below average learners. Many below average learners could not get involved in practice. Teachers reported it was because they lacked the capacity to

participate with their limited knowledge of English. The study found that the above average learners practised by speaking to their teachers and peers without being ashamed of their mistakes. One teacher commented on his school's encouragement of the practice strategy saying:

> Learners are encouraged to practise speaking English because at our school, we have a motto which says *defective but effective communication.* This means we insist that learners should speak only English and through mistakes learners will end up being good English speakers. (Teacher 1, Bomba secondary school, 9/09/2010)

The above comments confirm that practice is a very important strategy which can enhance performance in learning. Learners reported that they practised speaking English with friends and teachers in order to be fluent. It was also reported by Aliko and Bomba teachers that debating clubs also helped learners to practise and improve their English speaking. Commenting on the importance of speaking practice, an above average learner explained:

> Practice makes perfect, *munthu umaphunzira chilankhulo pochiyankhula mopanda manyazi kuti usekedwa. Umaphunzira pa zolakwitsa zakozo*. (You learn a language by practising using it without being ashamed of being laughed at. You learn through mistakes). (Learner 4, Aliko secondary school, 07/08/2010)

However, it was also observed and reported that learners and teachers in two schools out of four were not taking speaking practice seriously. Teachers spoke Chichewa to their learners and when teaching, some code-switched to translate. This agrees with Oxford (1990) who found that most of the language teachers did not view communication as a

priority and the few who cared about communication knew little or nothing about how to help their learners to communicate. Asking them why they translated, a teacher said:

> Some of our learners are dull and we speak Chichewa for them to grasp what we are teaching them. (Teacher 2, Dowe CDSS, 17/08/2010)

The above statement shows how some teachers failed to be role models on speaking practice. This negatively affected learners' performance leading to failure to speak English by many learners. It was observed that because of such poor role models, some below average learners used the practice strategy but the quality of the strategy use was low. There was too much of literal translation from Chichewa and code-switching. For example, during a reading comprehension lesson, one below average learner talking about a man who misappropriated funds from his company said:

"*The man ate a lot of money.*"(Observation, Bomba secondary school, 27/07/2010)

This literal translation from Chichewa to English shows the declining standards of English proficiency by many learners because of lack of practice. This result indicates that teachers are to blame for not reinforcing the English speaking rule.

In all the four schools, learners and teachers reported that classroom practice was minimal. They said it was because the English syllabus was loaded; large classes; national examination system which does not examine speaking and listening and teachers' teaching styles which hindered learners from practising. These affected the performance of the learners. Furthermore, it was found that the English speaking rule in 2 out of 4 schools was just on paper. Learners spoke Chichewa in their class groups and

even outside. Asking why they did not practise speaking, learners reported that they liked learning what was examinable in the national examinations and speaking was not part of it. One of the below average learners argued:

> *English ili ndi zinthu zambiri zoti tiphunzire kuti tikhonze mayeso. Chofunika kwambiri ndi* certificate. *Ndimadana ndi kutaya nthawi yambiri ndi kuphunzira zinthu zosafunsa pa mayeso monga kuyankhula chizungu ndi* debate. *(*The English language syllabus is loaded and there are a lot of things to cover in order for us to pass examinations. What is important is obtaining a certificate. I hate wasting more time on things which are not examinable like speaking and debate). (Chombo CDSS, 7/08/2010)

This statement proves that examinations hindered learners from English speaking practice leading to lack of fluency. The study found a strong relationship between speaking practice and performance. All the eight teachers concurred that speaking practice improved performance. The statements reveal that only few secondary schools encourage listening and speaking practice on their learners and force their learners to interact in English. In many schools learners practise in speaking and listening becomes minimal because the learners do not have role models. It could also be because teachers fail to speak in English to their learners and during lessons in two schools, code-switching was common. The other reason for lack of practice in listening and speaking by learners could be that teachers always do not have enough time to finish the syllabus. For example, during every third term, lessons for the form threes are affected during national examination periods when many teachers go for invigilation and marking and also many schools do not have enough classrooms to teach while examinations are in progress. To prepare their learners for examinations, teachers ignore listening and speaking lessons and concentrate on grammar and writing. They also make their lessons more of teacher

centred in order to teach many things within a short time. This hinders the learners from practice. Because of the idea that what is important is passing examinations, some learners also react or become less involved when a teacher spends more time on teaching listening and speaking skills which are not examined.

4.1.1.2 Practice in English writing

The study found that learners used writing practice as a learning strategy. With reference to Table 2, 42 above and 30 below average learners practiced writing. The results show variations between the two groups of learners. The above average learners still used this strategy highly. Commenting on the writing of exercises, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndimayesetsa kulemba* exercise *iri yonse yomwe tapatsidwa ndi aphunzitsi. Izi zimathandiza kudziwa ngatidi tamva kapena ayi ndipo timachita* correction *pa zomwe talakwa. Ndimayesetsa kuchita* practice *kalembedwe ka* composition *pa ma* topic *osiyana siyana tikaweluka ndi kukapereka kwa aphunzitsi kuti achite* mark *ndi kundithandiza.* Practice *imandithandiza kukhoza kwambiri ma* composition. (I make sure I write all the exercises given by the teacher. This helps me to judge if I have learnt the material or not and I make corrections on the questions which I get wrong. I try to practice writing compositions after classes and I give them to the teacher for marking and assistance. This helps me to perform highly on compositions). (Aliko secondary school, 24/09/2010)

The quotation shows that the above average learners were very active and committed to learning the writing skill. The above average learners also always led in class assignments. For example, in group compositions at Chombo, the above average learners dominated. They were the ones elected to be group leaders and secretaries. Some below average learners were seen copying notes for other subjects and others were quiet. The

differences between the above and below average could be because in schools with large classes like Chombo and Dowe, there was little following up to check if all learners handed in their work. This resulted in many below average learners not writing the assignments which they usually found difficult. One language teacher explained that it was because getting few assignments from learners eased their marking. Another teacher also reported that due to large classes some teachers were not checking if all learners handed in their assignments. To ease their work, they also minimised the number of exercises and questions. This promoted lack of writing practice by the learners. Commenting on limited exercises, a teacher said:

> With the problem of large classes, we try to minimize exercises and the number of questions to reduce the marking load. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 9/09/2010)

The above comment suggests that in schools with large classes, writing practice was minimal. Teachers preferred learners to do exercises orally to writing or just asked them to answer few questions in writing. Learners at Dowe reported that some teachers marked the exercises late and others did not give feedback after tests indicating that they did not mark. This discouraged some learners from practising writing. This agrees with Kyriacou (1998) who states that the way in which learners' work is marked, recorded and reported has an impact on learners' subsequent motivation. However, according to Table 2, out of all the practice strategies it showed that below average learners scored highly on writing practice. It was suggested that it could be because writing all exercises from the teacher was compulsory in most of the secondary schools. Learners were observed being sent out because of not writing assignments at Aliko secondary school. The study revealed that

the below average learners were not contributing much during group writing assignments. Such learners read books from other subjects; others refused the writing responsibility in the group because they could not write correctly. Observation also showed that the high performers finished earlier and went for marking. The low performers handed in their work late. Asked why they handed in their class work late, one below average learner explained:

> *Timadikira ozidziwawo alembe kaye kenaka nafe tilembe.* (We wait for those who know the answers to write first so that we can copy from them). (Learner 8, Dowe CDSS 7/9/2010)

In the congested classrooms, the study revealed that more than 90% of the below average learners got the entire exercise questions correct because of copying from each other. This shows they did not practise the class work adequately and this led to lack of retrieval and application during tests ending up failing. The study found a strong relationship between writing practice and performance. The English writing skill was important because it was examined. Teachers encouraged it by forming writing clubs but it was always the above average learners that joined them to practise meaningful writing. The above average learners that practiced writing performed highly. This shows that learners practised writing and the above average learners who were more knowledgeable assisted the below average to perform well in the classroom. This is in line with constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1962) concerning the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where the less knowledgeable learners perform better when assisted than doing the activities on their own. The statements from teachers above also indicate that learners' practice in writing especially in compositions sometimes does not receive feedback, learners who do

MALAWI COLLECTION

not write exercises are rarely followed up and that teachers give limited exercises to reduce their marking load. The findings present the opposite of what teachers are expected of professionally. Generally teachers are supposed to be hard working and committed. This negligence of their duties affects learners' performance.

4.1.1.3 Practice in English reading and performance

The study found that learners used practice in English reading as a language learning strategy. With reference to Table 2 above, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 44 above and 24 below average learners used this strategy. This reveals that the above average learners practiced highly because of motivation and higher knowledge of English. The below average were not practising much because they had language difficulties and lacked motivation.They did not like reading practice because of failing to apply intelligent guessing and had limited vocabulary. They were not taking reading lessons seriously. For example, observing a lesson at Dowe, the below average learners joined groups slowly and others did not even bother to go where the books were. Others sat on the opposite side of the books making them to read words upside down. This made learners fail to comprehend the passage. Commenting why they did not take reading seriously, a below average learner said:

> *Mabuku omwe timawerenga ndi ovuta ndipo aphunzitsi athu sadziwa kuphunzitsa. Koma amatiumirizidwa kuchita* practise *kuwerenga pa zomwe sitingamvetse patokha. (*The books we read have difficult passages, the teacher does not know how to teach but we are forced to practice what we do not understand on our own). (Dowe secondary school, 17/08/2010)

The above statement shows lack of motivation by the below average learners to apply practice strategies of reading and listening. These learners explained that the teacher did not know how to teach because she used learner-centred teaching which they found difficult because they did not like doing things by themselves. Four teachers suggested that the lack of practice in reading by some below average learners could also be because of the quality of learners selected to their schools who did not pass well in their national examinations and others who just found places after failing the examinations. During a reading lesson, differences in behaviour between the above and below average learners were also noted. The below average learners were not active while the successful ones were active and read seriously. They guessed intelligently about the story and answered pre-reading questions very well. Learners reported that they practised reading by utilizing their school libraries. They read novels, short stories and magazines. Commenting on reading, one above average learners said:

> *Kuwerenga ndi kumvetsa nkhani ndikofunika* practice *chifukwa comprehension imabwera pa mayeso. Kuwerenga kumatithandizanso kudziwa mawu atsopano achizungu amene tingagwiritse ntchito polemba kapena kumva ndi kulankhula. Masiku ano* literature *inasakanizidwa ndi language ndiye timayenera kuwerenga kwambiri kuti titsirize mabukuwa ndi kuwamvetsa. Kuwerenga kumatithandiza kukhoza bwino pa mayeso.* (Reading practice is important because comprehension is examinable. It also helps us to widen our knowledge of vocabulary which can be applied in the other skills like speaking and writing. With the combination of English language and literature, we are forced to read seriously in order to finish and understand the novels. Reading helps us to perform well in examinations). (Learner 4, Bomba secondary school, 11/09/2010)

The statements by this above average learner show that they were very committed to reading in order to perform well during examinations. This led to their success.

Asking teachers on how learners used reading as a LLS one of them explained:

> Reading is very important to the learners' success. The language subject was merged with literature and without serious reading learners cannot analyse the books. The above average read seriously all the time while the below average panic to memorise in the last minute. This leads to their failure. (Chombo secondary school 23/09/2010)

The above quotation shows that examination influenced learners to read seriously. The study found a strong relationship between reading practice and performance. Reading for comprehension is examined in the national examinations and the above average students that were observed practising it seriously in the classroom performed highly. In summary of practice, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of practice using the four language skills. The study found a strong relationship between practice and performance. The above average learners were successful because they practiced what they learnt. The lack of adequate practice in the four language skills made the below average learners perform poorly and score less than half despite other factors.

4.1.2 Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy

Creating structure for input and output is the making and arranging for both comprehension and production of the target language (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table .1 on page 48, 43 above average and 15 below average learners used this strategy. The figures indicate that more above average learners used this strategy than the below average ones. Under this sub-cognitive strategy, learners used two sets of sub-strategies

which were note taking and summary and highlighting. These have further been explained in Table 3 and the sections following.

Table 3: Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy

Creating structure for input and output strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Note-taking and summary	31	5
Highlighting	28	25

With reference to Table 3 above, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of creating a structure for input and output. Under this sub-strategy, learners used note-taking and summary and highlighting as cognitive sub-strategy sets. The number of above average learners who used all these sets of strategies was much higher compared to those who were below average. The reasons for the high and low use of these strategies have been explained according to each set. As indicated in Table 3, the study found a strong relationship between note-taking and summary and performance. A weak relationship was found between highlighting and performance. These have been discussed in detail in the following sub-section

4.1.2.1 Note-taking and summary

Observation and interviews revealed that 31 above average learners and only 5 below average learners used the strategy of note-making and summary. This shows the above average learners led in the use of this strategy. This could be because they were focused in their learning. The below average learners hardly used these strategies. The study

found that it was because of their deficiency in the English language and inadequate use of their mental processes. The above average ones used note taking and summary and the following statement asserts the use of note-taking and summary.

> Taking notes and summarizing what the teachers say make me pay attention and have a record of what was said in class. I also know what was not covered in class. (Focus group, Chombo secondary school, 20/09/2010).

In order to create a structure for the input and output, learners took notes involving their mental processes to write down the specific points when given a passage or listening to it orally. The above average learners took notes on what they heard and read. They were also good at summarizing long passages compared to the below average learners. Note-making and summarizing were examinable during national examinations and this forced them to learn this strategy although the below average learners still failed. As evidence of this, a below average learner explained:

> *Ine sinditha kuchita zinthu ziwiri nthawi imodzi monga kumvetsera ndi kulemba. Nthawi zonse ndimalephera* note-taking *ndi* summary *pa mayeso chifukwa sindizimvetsa kalembedwe kache.* (I fail to do two things at a time listening to the teacher and taking notes. I fail note taking and summary during tests because I don't understand how to do them). (Dowe CDSS, learner 4, 24/09/2010)

The statement above revealed that the below average learners used note-taking and summary strategies miserably and incorrectly leading to their failure.

Commenting on the relationship between note-taking and summary and performance, a teacher said:

> Note-taking and summarizing are advanced strategies. Although they are taught, only the above average learners know how to use them resulting in high performance. Many below average students fail because they can hardly spell out words on their own (Teacher 2 Bomba secondary school, 24/09/2010)

The study revealed a strong relationship between note-making and summary and performance. The two skills were examinable and failure to understand them led to examination failure hence poor performance. Learners who used the strategy were highly successful. From these sentiments, the above average learners used their mental processes more than the below average whose thinking capacity seemed weak to process information. Relating to the information processing model, the above average learners were successful because their minds took in the information and organised it to be retrieved at a later time. A number of the below average learners received the information incorrectly. Due to their limited knowledge of English, they failed to organise and summarize it. They could not store what their teachers and books taught them on how to make notes and summaries. This led to lack of retrieval resulting into failure.

4.1.2.2 Highlighting

With reference to Table 3, observation and interviews also showed that 28 above average and 25 below average learners out of 96 highlighted important information and main points in their exercise books. This shows that the above average learners slightly used the highlighting strategy more highly than the below average learners. This could be because of their commitment to learning. Compared to the other strategies for creating a

structure for the input and output, the below average performed highly on this strategy. This was because highlighting was easy and did not require a lot of thinking. The researcher's observation revealed that in all the schools 53 out of 96 learners had red, black, blue and green pens and pencils for writing and highlighting. Learners also bolded the main points with the same colour or a different one. The red pen was also used to highlight main points in the teachers' notes, passages during examinations and in their personal books. When they were asked why they highlighted, one of the above average learners said:

> *Kukongoletsa ndi kuwalitsa mitu ya notes kumathandiza kuti tizichita study mosavuta. Zimatithandizanso kuwerenga ma* main points *mwachangu ndi kuyesa kukumbukira ma* sub points. *Sitivutikanso tikamafuna* information *mofulumira. (*Highlighting main points makes our studying easy. It also helps us to read a point quickly and try to remember the sub points and search for information easily). (Focus group 2, Dowe secondary school, 12/08/2010)

Asking a below average learner why highlighting was important, she said:

> *Kuwalitsa kumathandiza* notes *zanga kukhala zokongola ndikusangalatsa poziona (*Highlighting helps to make my notes beautiful to look at). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 12/08/2010)

From the above comments, learners used highlighting for different purposes. The above average learners used it mainly to assist them when studying while this below average learner mainly used them for beauty. Out of 8 teachers, 5 reported that highlighting as a strategy had a weak relationship with performance. Learners highlighted but others could not apply other strategies like reviewing seriously to enhance their performance. It was reported that the below average learners who also used this strategy mainly used it for the

decoration of their exercise books. Some were found doing it while lessons were in progress. This sometimes hindered them from using other strategies. Commenting on highlighting and performance relationship, a teacher explained:

> Highlighting does not enhance high performance because there are some above average learners who just write their notes neatly without highlighting but perform very well. Highlighting is an easy strategy which can work depending on the individual and only if combined with other strategies. The below average just get interested to highlight and hardly use the notes. Others highlight during lessons instead of listening to the teacher. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 7/09/2010)

The above quotations indicate that highlighting as a cognitive set was one of the strategies which the below average learners used most but still performed poorly. This shows that highlighting on its own without other manipulative skills does not enhance performance. It was revealed that the above average learners combined highlighting with other manipulative language learning strategies in order to succeed. In summary, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of creating a structure for input and output which consisted of the cognitive sets of note-making and summary and highlighting. The study revealed a strong relationship between note-making and summary and performance. A weak relationship was revealed between highlighting and performance.

4.1.3 Memorization

With reference to Table 1 on page 48, out of the 96 learners interviewed, 33 above average and 30 below average learners used memorization as a cognitive strategy. Differences were noted between the below and above average learners in their choice of memory strategies which resulted into the success of the above average and the failure of

the below average. Learners reported that memory helped them to be able to understand the spoken and written language and to produce it in speaking and writing. In support of this, a teacher explained:

> Without memory, there cannot be achievement because there cannot be retrieval of what learners learn in order to pass examinations. (Teacher 1, Dowe CDSS 15/09/2010)

The memory strategies which learners used have further been clarified in Table 4.

Table 4: Memorization as a sub-cognitive strategy

Memory strategies	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Rote memorization	19	44
Reviewing work done	47	16

Based on Table 4, learners used memory strategies of rote memorization and reviewing work done in order to remember what they learnt. The below average learners used rote memorization more highly than the above average ones and the above average learners greatly used reviewing of the work done as a memory strategy. The study found a weak relationship between rote memorization and performance because those who used it very highly performed poorly. They failed tests miserably if the same questions were twisted a bit because they lacked the capacity to reason and understand the material. There was a strong relationship between reviewing work done and performance. Learners who reviewed their work seriously remembered and understood what was learnt resulting in

meaningful learning. The memory strategies learners used are further discussed in the sections below.

4.1.3.1 Rote memorization

Rote memorization as a strategy was reported by learners and teachers but it was not found in the different authors' typology. With reference to Table 4, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 19 above average and 44 below average learners used rote memorization. The study found that this cognitive set was highly used by the below average learners. The high degree of use especially by the below average was because learners were learning with an aim to pass examinations rather than to know English. The study found that rote memorization mostly without understanding was common among below average learners.The following excerpt from a below average learner shows why below average learners relied much on rote memorization.

> *Tikamalephera kukumbukira zomwe tikuwerenga ndiponso zotivuta mwachitsanzo ma* preposition *ndi* order of adjectives *timangoyamba kuloweza kuti tingokhoza mayeso.*(If we cannot remember what we study and what we find difficult, for example, prepositions and order of adjectives, we just turn to serious memorization even if we do not understand them in order to pass examinations). (Learner 4, Dowe secondary school, 7/09/2010)

However, Wenden and Rubin (1987) states that the learner who automatically relies on rote memorization may fail to perceive the inherent meaningfulness of the material to be remembered. It was found that below average learners relied much more on this strategy than the other memory strategies but still failed. The above average learners not only used it but also combined it with other strategies to make their learning meaningful. They

reported that they used rote memorization when they met long lists of the material which they could not remember in a test or an examination. As evidence of this, an above average learner explained:

> *Kuti tikhoze kwambiri, mayeso akakhala pafupi timaloweza zinthu zomwe sitikuzimva kapena kuzikumbukira* for example, long lists and rules *ndi* grammar *monga* order of adjectives in a noun phrase *ndi ma* preposition. *Zina zonse timazikumbukira pozimvetsa mkalasi, kuchita* practice *ndi kuziwerenga kwambiri.* (In order to succeed, rote memorization helps us to remember long lists, order of some rules and confusing grammar mainly in times of tests and examinations. For example, the order of adjectives in a noun phrase and prepositions. Most of the topics we learn are remembered through understanding in class, practising and reading). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

When the teachers were interviewed, six out of eight reported that rote learning did not enhance permanent performance because the below average learners who used it frequently were failures. Learners easily failed what they memorized if the wording of the questions or order was changed. In many instances, they ended up giving back what they memorized on a wrong question because of lack of understanding and application.

As evidence of this, one teacher said:

> Rote memorization is highly used by the below average as a memory strategy but it does not help them to pass examinations because when questioning order and language is changed, they fail to think and relate (Aliko secondary school 3/10/2010)

From the above quotations, rote memorization was highly used by the below average learners to remember work done in order to give the same back during examinations word for word without understanding. The 44 out of 48 below average learners who used rote memorisation reported they used it because of not having enough time and too much

work that made them just memorise when examinations were near. This resulted in their failure. Out of the 48 above average learners, 19 reported that they used rote memorization only when they had long lists and in order to perform better. The remaining 28 did not use rote memorization but stored the long lists through practising and reviewing for a period of time. When the teachers were asked, it was reported that rote memorization did not enhance performance and they discouraged it as an archaic strategy of learning among secondary school learners. Instead they encouraged their learners to understand the material and work hard all the time instead of working hard the last minute when they heard about the impending examinations. Rote memorization is not in line with constructivism which states that the purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning and not just memorizing right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1.3.2 Reviewing work done

Reviewing means going over work done at carefully spaced intervals, close together and then more widely spaced apart. This is also called spiralling (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 4, 47 out of 48 above average and only 16 out of 48 below average learners used this strategy in order to remember what they learnt. This shows that the above average learners used this strategy very highly. Few of the below average used this strategy. The below average ones failed to review their work seriously and many gave excuses of lack of time. Others sighted household chores, distance from their homes, blackouts and lack of electricity in their homes. This could be because the below average failed to organize their time to review. Teachers reported that the below average learners

were always procrastinating although they were reminded that procrastination was an enemy of academic excellence. Asking them why they failed to review their work seriously, one of the below average learners said:

> *Timalephera kuwerenga nsanga zomwe tangoziphunzira chifukwa zochita ndi zambiri ndipo nthawi sipezeka. Timakhala tikuphunzira nthawi zonse nthawi zina ndi usiku omwe.* (We fail to review the work done because there is too much work and we do not find time to review the work done seriously. We are always learning and sometimes we have night classes). (Learner 6, Bomba secondary school, 27/08/2010)

However, the above average learners reported that reviewing the work done on the four language skills helped them to store the information in the long term memory. This is in line with the information processing model which states that for learning to take place, information must be stored in the long term memory so that it can be retrieved when required. Answering why they reviewed their work, an above average learner also said:

> *Ndimawerenga* notes *zanga tikangotha kuphunzira* English *chifukwa ndimaopa kuti pakapita nthawi ndiziiwala.*I review my short notes soon after the English class because I can forget easily if it takes long. (Learner 4 Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

The statements show that the above average planned their time well but with the same environment the below average complained about time to review their work. It was reported by all teachers that reviewing work done improved learners' memory and understanding resulting in meaningful learning and higher performance. Teachers reported that they always reminded their learners about the importance of this strategy but few below average learners reviewed seriously. This affected their performance negatively.

Commenting on the relationship between reviewing work done and performance, a teacher explained:

> Reviewing work done aims at over learning the material in order to be so familiar with the information so that it becomes natural and automatic. This makes the material to be retained in the long term memory and to retrieve it easily during examinations leading to learners' high performance. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 28/07/2010)

The study found a strong relationship between reviewing work done and learners' performance. The above average students who reviewed their work seriously were successful. This showed that reviewing work done contributed to their success. Learners who were lazy in reviewing their work failed.

In summary of cognitive strategies, the study found a strong relationship between practice in the four language skills, note-making and summary and reviewing work done with how learners performed. However the study found a weak relationship between rote memorization and highlighting with performance.

4.2 Compensation strategies used by secondary school learners

The study found that learners used compensation strategies to make up for their inadequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Compensation strategies used by learners

Compensation Strategies	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Code-switching	23	31
Delaying when Speaking	40	30
Avoiding Communication	22	40

The study found that both above and below average learners used code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication in order to compensate for their limited knowledge of spoken English. The table also shows the learners who used this strategy. The below average learners from all types of schools rarely practiced speaking. This resulted into such learners code-switching to Chichewa highly and avoiding communication whenever a chance to speak arose. Despite their high use of these strategies, the below average learners performed poorly. In comparison with the below average students, the above average used delaying when speaking highly and few used code-switching and avoiding communication. This reveals that the above average students made efforts to remain in the English conversations. The study further found a weak relationship between all the compensation strategies the learners used and performance.

4.2.1 Code-switching

With reference to Table 5, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 23 above average and 31 below average learners code-switched to Chichewa when speaking English. This

shows that the strategy was used by the below average learners more than the above average learners. Asking how code-switching assisted them, a below average learner said:

> *Kusakaniza Chichewa ndi chizungu kumatithandiza kuti nkhani isathele pompo pamene mau a chizungu athawa m'mutu. Zimatithandizanso kumvetsa zomwe akutiphunzitsa mosavuta.* (Code switching to Chichewa helps us to continue a conversation even when we cannot recall the appropriate structure of English words. It also helps us to understand new content and new knowledge is transmitted effectively). (Chombo secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Code-switching to Chichewa was common when learners were communicating with their peers and teachers. Learners at Dowe CDSS were observed reading the passage in English but discussing the contents in Chichewa and English. Asked why they code-switched, one above average learner said:

> *Timayankhula m'Chichewa kuti aliyense athe kupereka maganizo mosavuta Tikakambirana m'chizungu ambiri sayankha ndipo samamva.Timalankhula chizungu pokachita* present *ndi polankhula ndi aphunzitsi. (*We turn to Chichewa so that all of us should contribute freely. If we use English only, many will not understand and contribute. We make sure that we use only English when presenting and speaking to the teacher). (Dowe CDSS, 3/10/2010)

The study found a weak relationship between code-switching and performance because although it partly enhanced speech performance by helping learners to remain in a conversation, spoken English was not examinable. In addition, the below average who mostly used it performed poorly in all the four language skills.

Commenting on code-switching and its failure to enhance learning, a teacher said:

> If over used, code-switching discourage learners from practising the target language because they end up using few English words and more Chichewa words. (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

It was reported that learners code-switched in the classroom frequently because they were spoilt during their early years of learning English in that there was no speech practice and encouragement. According to the secondary school objectives for English language learning, by form three learners were supposed to communicate in English fluently (Malawi Institute of Education, 2002). Teachers explained that to overcome this challenge, they tried to help learners' practice by making sure code-switching is not overdone and is phased out in the English language classroom as learners advanced. This was done by encouraging learners to use simple words to communicate.

The results show that on average, the below average learners code-switched more than the above average ones. This could be because of their knowledge of English language which was more limited than was the case with the other group. The statements also indicate that teachers and above average learners code-switched for solidarity in order to help the below average understand and with time they got used. These results agree with Kalong (2008) who found that people code-switch for solidarity as well as to signal group membership and local identification. This is also in line with Vygotsky's constructivist theory which states that the knowledgeable assist the less knowledgeable to learn.

4.2.2 Delaying when speaking

Out of 96 learners interviewed, 70 said that in order to overcome their limitations in speaking, they delayed the speech using words like "mmm", "aaaa", "eeem" in order to have enough time to think about what to say. Others delayed while scratching their heads. Out of the 96 interviewed, 40 above average and 30 below average learners used this strategy.

A below average learner explained:

> *Kulankhula mochedwetsa kumathandiza kuti tisankhe mawu tisanayankhule kuopa kuchita manyazi tikalephera* (Delaying in speaking English helps us to select our vocabulary before speaking to avoid being embarrassed). (Bomba secondary school, 3/10/2010)

The above average learners tried to speak in English more regularly than the below average ones. As evidence of delaying when speaking, one above average learner reported:

> I scratch my head when I am in problems with speaking and then say what ever comes out. (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 21/07/2010)

Teachers said that there was a weak relationship between delaying in speaking and performance because speaking was not examinable. When commenting on this fact, a teacher said:

> Delaying in speaking makes the speaker remember what to say next but it does not enhance performance directly because speaking is not examined in English here in Malawi. (Teacher 2, Dowe secondary school, 17/08/2010)

MALAWI COLLECTION

Such sentiments suggest that teachers should assist learners to speak English by being role models and giving encouragement to learners that speaking should be taken seriously because competence in spoken English is the main qualification for a lot of jobs (Matiki, 2001).

4.2.3 Avoiding communication partially or totally

The study observed that learners avoided communication in English especially when difficulties and embarrassment were anticipated. With reference to Table 5, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 22 above average and 40 below average learners avoided communicating in English. The below average ones were observed avoiding communicating in English. For example, they said they hated going to the staff room because teachers would communicate to them in English. When there was a need to go to the staff room, they were spotted rehearsing what to say.

Commenting on why they avoided communication, a below average learner said:

> *Kuyankhula chizungu ndisakudziwa kumandisowetsa mtendere. Izi zimandichititsa kuzemba anthu okonda kuyankhula mu chizungu monga aphunzitsi. Nthawi zina amatimoka, kutikonza kapena kutifunsa chizungu pamaso pa aphunzitsi ena ndiponso anzathu. Tikalakwitsa amatikumbukira ndi ma* mistakes *amenewo ndipo nthawi zina limasanduka dzina lathu.*

(Using English when I do not know it very well makes me feel tense. This makes me avoid communicating in the language with people who know it very well like teachers to avoid being embarrassed. Some of these teachers mock, correct and test us with questions in front of other teachers and learners. If we make an English grammar mistake, we are remembered with that mistake and sometimes it becomes our name). (Learner 1, Chombo secondary school, 8/08/2010)

In the classroom, some of such learners did not raise their hands even if they knew the answers. Teachers had to force them to answer questions. The study found a weak relationship between avoiding communication and performance. It was reported that this strategy reduced efforts by learners to practice the target language. Tarone (1977) also noted that avoiding communication as a strategy is not directly related to learning because it does not address areas of confusion. Concurring with the above statement an above average learner said:

Ndimaona kuti kuli bwino kumayesetsa kulankhula ngati mmene achitira mwana chifukwa timaphunzira kuchokera pa ma mistakes *athu (It* is better to keep on trying to speak like a child than to avoid communication because we learn from our mistakes). (Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

The statements clearly show that it was mostly the below average learners who failed to speak English and used avoiding communication strategy most unlike the above average who tried. Although avoiding communication as a learning strategy has an advantage of keeping the learner emotionally protected, it goes against the aim of speaking and as such it cannot promote any language learning skill. This means learners should just be

encouraged to interact in English by encouraging them that learning comes through mistakes.

Overall, the study found that learners used compensation strategies of code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication. The study found a weak relationship between all the compensation strategies the learners used and performance.

4.3 Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners

The study revealed that learners used meta-cognitive strategies and that all the meta-cognitive strategies learners used promoted their performance. The meta-cognitive strategies which the learners used and their relationship with performance have further been discussed and analyzed in Table 6 and the sections that follow.

Table 6: Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners

Meta-cognitive Strategy	**Above Average learners out of 48**	**Below Average Learners out of 48**
Paying attention	45	40
Planning	43	19
Evaluating	36	12

With reference to Table 6, learners used the sub-strategies of paying attention, arranging and planning for their learning and evaluating their learning. Both types of learners were

rated highly on attention. However, only the above average learners were rated highly on planning. Lastly, the above average learners evaluated their learning but the below average ones also lagged behind. The meta- cognitive sub- strategies learners used and how they were related to their performance have been analyzed and discussed further in the following sections.

4.3.1 Paying attention

The study revealed that paying attention was the highest used sub-strategy by all types of learners in the whole study. It was found that 45 out of 48 above average and 40 out of 48 below average learners used this meta-cognitive strategy. Results revealed that the first step in managing the learning of English was to pay attention to details and become part of the learning process. It was learnt that this strategy was highly used because in the classrooms, paying attention was compulsory and those who disturbed mostly did it without the knowledge of the teacher. On the importance of this strategy, a teacher explained:

> Paying attention to what is said in the classroom is the first step to success. A learner who misses English classes hardly performs very well. The below average learners pay attention but some do not understand. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 27/08/2010)

All teachers during interviews reported that learners showed their attention by being quiet and facing the teacher to capture the mouth and the body language.

Teacher 1 from Bomba during interviews said this about the evidence of attention:

> If you move to another place learners' eyes follow. (Bomba secondary school, 28/09/2010)

Observation revealed that in every class, learners used this strategy of paying attention mostly during listening and speaking. One of the above average learners during the individual learner interview commented on what he did in order to pay attention in detail.

> *Ndimayesetsa kupewa khalidwe lokhala mkalasi koma maganizo ali kutali. Ndimayesetsa kuiwala mavuto anga ndikungoganiza za kuphunzira ndi kumangomvetsera. (*I try to avoid the tendency of being physically in class but mentally and emotionally being thousands of kilometres away. I make sure I forget my worries, just think of the lesson and pay attention). (Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Through observation, it was found that learners used this strategy very much especially at Aliko and Bomba secondary schools. The high numbers of both above and below average learners paying attention revealed that the strategy was a very important tool for learning. To capture everything in the classroom, learners were very organized with pens and exercise books for English and just before the lesson began, there was silence. Learners from Bomba were observed resisting dozing by standing up at the back of the class in order not to miss anything. However, observation showed that at Chombo CDSS, there were 5 learners out of a class of 67 and at Dowe School, 15 out of 100 learners on average who were not attentive. Some were copying notes for different subjects while others disturbed their classmates by making noise.

The study found that paying attention had a high and strong relationship with performance. Out of the 48 above average learners, 26 reported that they were not forced to be attentive but consciously wanted to remain focussed in order to achieve their goals. Thinking about their goals made them more attentive and this resulted into high performance. The below average learners used attention highly but performed poorly and it was reported that it was because they pretended to be attentive because it was a must to be quiet and face the teacher. Teachers reported that a number of below average learners looked attentive for fear of the teacher but were not focussed. For example, they were observed failing to answer questions asked on what the teacher had just said. This lack of focus contributed to their failure. Asking a below average learner why she failed after being observed looking very attentive, she said:

> *Ndimaoneka ngati ndikumvetsera koma maganizo anga amakhala pa mavuto omwe ndimakomana nawo pa moyo wanga monga umphawi ndi kusalidwa ndi anzanga* (I look very attentive but my mind switches to my worries about life. For example, I think about poverty and rejection by peers). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

Commenting on whether below average learners paid attention in class, teachers concurred that some learners perform poorly because they fail to concentrate on learning but think about their family misfortunes. They get emotionally affected even after counselling them. According to the information processing model, paying attention is the first step and the most important. The way the information has been received will determine if the brain has processed and stored the correct information or not. If incorrect information is stored it will be retrieved during examinations leading to low performance.

Such being the case, learners need to be serious and interact with friends and teachers on where they are not clear before the learnt material is stored in the long term memory.

4.3.2 Organizing and planning for one's learning

With reference to Table 6 above, this meta- cognitive strategy was used by 43 above average and only 19 below average learners. All teachers reported that learners who used this strategy seriously performed considerably well. Concurring with this, a teacher explained:

> We encourage planning their learning because it enhances their performance and that lack of it is planning to fail. (Bomba secondary school, 15/9/2010)

The sub- strategies learners used have further been discussed in Table 7.

Table 7: Organizing and planning as a meta-cognitive strategy

Organizing and planning for one's learning strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Organizing their Learning	46	26
Finding out about Learning	44	18
Goal setting	39	13

Within the organizing and planning for one's learning strategy, learners used the sub-strategy sets of organizing, finding out about language learning and setting goals. In all the meta-cognitive sets, the above average learners were rated highly compared to the below average ones.The study found a strong relationship between all the organizing and

planning sets and performance. The organizing and planning sets are further discussed in detail.

4.3.2.1 Organizing

This involves the organising of one's schedule, physical environment like space, temperature, sound, lighting and a language note book (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 7, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed 46 above average and 26 below average used this strategy. This shows that the above average ones used it more than the below average ones. Teachers suggested that this could be because the above average learners were more focused on their learning than the others who lacked motivation. The above average learners reported that they organized their materials by collecting and classifying them by topic, grammatical pattern or language skill for easy reference. They organized their time such that everything was done on time. For example, they were observed sitting quietly with English exercise books and pens ready and were attentive to their teacher. On what they did to get organized, an above average learner reported:

> *Timachita dongosolo powerengeratu zokaphunzira mawa lake kukonzekera kukafunsa ndi kuyankha mafunso mkalasi. Tikapatsidwa zoti tichite timaika mapoints mu ndondomeko. Mwachitsanzo zokayankhula, ma* composition note-making and summary *timaziika mu ndondomeko kuti zigwirizane komanso kuti tisabwereze bwereze. (*We start getting organized by reading about the coming topic in advance ready to answer and ask questions on the lesson. When we are given activities to do, we organize points before doing any task. For example, in public speeches, compositions, note making, summaries, we organize in order to write coherently and avoid repetitions). (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 9/09/2010)

All types of learners reported that they organized their learning by having a language note book to write what they encountered in language learning and making study time tables in order to schedule regular practice for each language skill. Commenting on the importance of having the time table, another above average learner explained:

> *Ndimakopera* timetable *ya mkalasi ndi kuigwiritsa ntchito popanga yanga kuti ndiziwerenga phunziro lisanafike kapena titangophunzira kumene. Izi zimatithandiza pochita dongosolo monga kulemberatu homework ndi kutenga mabuku oyenelera.* (I copy the class time table and use it to come up with my own study time table in order to study subjects before and after the class. This helps me to be organized by writing assignments required in the coming lesson and carrying the right materials). (Aliko focus group 2, 30/07/2010)

However, a number of learners from Chombo and Dowe schools reported that they had the time tables but failed to follow them because of disturbances like friends, lack of electricity in their homes, black outs, household chores and mare procrastination. As evidence of this, a below average learner reported:

> *Ma* timetable *ochitira zinthu tiri nawo koma timalephera kuwatsata bwinobwino. Nthawi zina timachedwa ndi zibalo, timachokera kutali, komanso nthawi zina timangozengereza chifukwa chocheza komanso kutanganidwa ndi ntchito za pakhomo. Chinanso ma* blackouts, *kutentha, udzudzu ndi kusowa ndalama zogulira ma* torch *zimasokoneza ndondomeko ya zinthu. (*We have the time tables for different activities but to follow them correctly is a problem. Sometimes we delay with punishments, others come from very far and sometimes we just postpone activities due to chatting with friends and house hold chores. On the organisation of the learning environment, black outs, the hot weather, mosquitoes and lack of money to get lamps and torches make us fail to get organised and do things on time). (Dowe CDSS, 18/09/2010)

These statements indicate that the below average learners had a poor organisation of activities and that they were lazy and not motivated. The above average learners who were focussed could easily avoid the punishments and schedule time for chatting with friends and do household chores. Some above average learners had similar situations but their plans were achieved. All teachers reported that getting organized helped learners to understand and led to their higher performance. Getting organized in their learning also made learners perform well during tests and examinations because they got organized in advance. Commenting on organisation, one teacher explained:

> Many below average learners are not organised. They do things in panic in the last minute and they end up doing things quickly and not well done. Examples of these things could be preparation for examinations, assignments, and even the next class. Some come to class and stay idle without writing exercises saying they have forgotten their pens and exercise books. (Teacher 2, Chombo CDSS, 10/10/2010)

The above sentiments reveal that getting organised and prepared for learning and examinations is an important step to high performance. It is necessary for teachers to train learners on time management and how to detect and avoid time wasters.

4.3.2.2 Finding out about their learning

Finding out about their learning means the learners' self management or understanding the conditions that help one learn and arrange for those conditions (Ellis, 1994). Learners reported that finding out about their learning as a strategy helped them to get organized. In line with table 7, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 44 above average and 18 below average used this strategy. This shows that few below average learners

used this strategy. Teachers suggested that it could be because the below average always wanted to be told and reminded and were not ready to find out things for themselves. They liked to be spoon fed on everything. Learners were reminded that they had the responsibility of finding out about their language learning. For example, learners aired out things which hindered their language learning through their prefects and class teachers to the authorities. For example, they reported the persistent absenteeism of their language teacher, shortage of language books and the teachers' teaching in relation to national examination system among the hindrances. On what they did to find out about their learning, one above average learner explained:

> *Timafufuza m'mene mayeso adzakhalire, m'mene aphunzitsi akuphunzitsira pofanizira ndi syllabus, mabuku ofunika ndi zoyenera kuchita kuti tizikhoze. Timakaperekanso madandaulo kwa achikulire athu pa zinthu zomwe zikusokoneza maphunziro.* (We find out the nature of the national examinations, the pace teachers take in relation to the syllabus, required text books and what to do to improve our performance. We also air out the things that hinder our learning to the authorities). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 18/09/2010)

Commenting on learners' responsibility for their learning, a teacher explained:

> The strongest inspector is the learner him or herself. Learners are able to know if teaching and learning is taking place or not and if the teaching will help them achieve their goal of passing examinations and not just knowing the language. They react if things are not normal. (Teacher 2, Bomba secondary school, 20/09/2010)

Learners also applied self management skills by being resourceful. They pestered their parents to buy the required books; borrowed materials from friends; inquired about learning from other schools and on what to do in order to succeed. Commenting on resourcefulness, a focus group above average learner explained:

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIB

MALAWI COLLECTION

> We ask our friends what and how they study and try to befriend the successful ones in order to learn more on their learning habits. (Dowe secondary school, 26/07/2010)

The excerpts show that learners were always finding out about how best to learn and to succeed. Asking the below average learners if they found out about their learning, one of them said:

> *Pa za maphunzirozi, pali zinthu zina timafufuza nawo monga kujomba ndi khalidwe la aphunzitsi. Zambiri timangoyangana chifukwa alipo eni ake amene amazitsata ndipo ife timangomva zothaitha.* (Concerning our learning, there are some things in which we get involved to find out like the absence and the behaviour of our teacher. However, there are certain things which have responsible people who follow them and we just hear the outcomes). (Chombo CDSS 26/07/2010)

The statements by this below average learner show that such learners were not seriously involved in finding out about their learning. They failed to manage their learning in several instances. For example, a teacher reported a situation where some below average learners were entering the hall to write an English examination without knowing the subject of the examination. That is, whether it was an English composition, multiple choice or comprehension paper. This means that they did not prepare for the specific paper. The study found a strong relationship between the strategy of finding out about one's learning and performance because learners who always inquired about their learning performed much better than those who did not. This strategy was used more by the above average learners who succeeded in their learning. The below average looked not concerned much about their learning. The above statements suggest the need for training learners that learning begins with the learner himself or herself and they are required to take the responsibility for their own learning. Authorities cannot be aware of

all the hindrances of learning if not informed. They also need to be reminded frequently in order to take action. Knowing that learners have this responsibility on their learning, learning institutions should also learn to address learners' grievances with seriousness or apologise and explain clearly why they fail to honour their grievances to avoid riots and strikes by learners. For example, absenteeism, rudeness and laziness of teachers are some of the issues which can be resolved.

4.3.2.3 Setting goals and objectives

According to Table 7 above, 39 above average, and 13 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the above average learners used this strategy more frequently than the below average ones. Rubin and Wenden (1987) state that learners without aims are like boats without rudders and such learners do not know where they are going so they might not get there. The above average and the few below average reported that they set goals and objectives on how to study every evening and when to finish their assignments. They reported that all their goals of achieving the four language skills led to the main goals of passing examinations and achieving their careers. Commenting on setting goals an above average learner explained:

> *Kukhala ndi zolinga zoti ndikwaniritse zimakhala zikundikumbutsa zofunika kuchita pa chaka, pa* term, *pamulungu pa* day *komanso pa* hour. *Chifukwa chakuti popanda kukhoza* English *palibe MSCE* certificate *ndipo ndi chiyankhulo chofunika. Ndimayesetsa kukhala ndi zolinga zondithandiza kulimbikira kwambiri. Mwachitsanzo ndimakhala ndi zolinga zoti ndizikhala pakati pa* number *1 kapena 3 pa ntchito kapena mayeso ali wonse chaka chino. Ndikamakhoza ndimakhala ndi chidwi kukwaniritsa zolingazi. Ndikasankha zolinga zanga ndikulonjeza ena monga makolo, aphunzitsi ndi anzanga zimandithandiza kupewa zina zonse ndi kuzipereka. Ndi chifukwa chake ndimakhoza kwambiri.*

(Goal setting is a reminder of what I must do in a year, term, week, day or hour. English being a deciding subject for passing MSCE and official means of communication, I make sure I set goals that will make me work very hard. For example, I set the goal that in my class, I should always take positions one to three in every language skill and test in this school year. It keeps me motivated to achieve the goal. Choosing a goal and promising others like my parents, teacher or friends to do well lead me to a greater feeling of self control and commitment and therefore a better performance). (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 19/08/2010)

The above statements conform that goal-setting is an important element of motivation and self-efficacy and encourages learner autonomy. For the below average learners, the few who said they set goals said they failed to achieve higher goals like taking high positions because they could not achieve them. Instead, their goal was to pass examination even with the lowest grade. One of the below average learners said:

Sitimalinga zambiri chifukwa sitingazikwanitse. Ife timangofuna kukhoza mayeso basi. Kukhoza ndi kukhoza, kaya ukhonza ndi 40% koma ukhala ndi pepala. Ife sitiphunzira ndi phuma ngati enawa koma potsiriza tonse ndi certificate *basi.* (We do not aim high because we cannot afford it. Our goal is to pass examinations. Passing is passing even if one passes with 40% but will still have the certificate. We do not panic when learning like these others but in the end we will all get a certificate). (Dowe CDSS, 20/09/2010)

Another below average learner said:

Ine sindikonda kukhala ndi zolinga kapena kulonjeza chifukwa palibe chimene ndingapindule. Lamulo langa ndi lakuti first things first. *Ndikatero ndimaona kuti zonse zikutha. Mwachitsanzo panopo sindingayambe kuganiza za mayeso pamene ma* homework *ali mbwee. Inetu ngakhale nditakhala ndi zolinga zotani kuti ndilimbikire ndimakhoza marks ake omweomweo basi. Chofunika apa ndichoti osamazipweteka ndi ntchito.*

(I don't like goal setting when learning because there is nothing I can achieve from that. My rule is doing first things first and I find myself doing things and finishing them. For example I cannot think of working for examinations when I have assignments to write. For me, no matter how I set my goals to work hard, in the end I get the same grade. The best way is not to overwork). (Chombo CDSS 18/09/2010)

The above statements show that the below average learners did not set high goals and others did not even have goals in their learning because of their continued under performance. They had no self-efficacy and lacked motivation leading to lack of focus. This promoted their low performance. Teachers reported that learners set goals especially the above average ones but many of the goals were kept by themselves. Learners who set high goals like going to the university to achieve a career were seen working extra hard and achieved their short term goals like studying schedules, practice and asking for assistance. One of the teachers reported:

Our learners set their goals in learning English but only few reveal them to us especially when counselling and guiding them in their career. We try to train them on the importance of goal setting during life skill teaching as a subject. Through learners' hardworking and seriousness we know they have goals to achieve. The below average also have goals but many of them are also below standard leading to low achievement. (Teacher 2, Bomba secondary school 2/10/2010)

The study found a strong relationship between setting goals and objectives and performance. The above average learners who set high goals and objectives to achieve worked hard to fulfil them leading to their success. The below average ones tried but with the loss of direction, they got confused and failed to perform well. This suggests that teachers should train their learners to work hard and aim high.

4.3.3 Evaluating one's learning

Evaluating one's learning means checking the outcomes of one's language learning against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy (Chamot, 1987). In conjunction with Table 7, 36 above average and 12 below average learners reported using this strategy. The study found that evaluating one's learning enhanced performance. The evaluation strategies which learners used and their relationship with performance have further been analysed and shown in Table 8 and discussion in the sections that follow.

Table 8: Evaluation as a meta-cognitive strategy

Evaluating one's learning	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Self-monitoring	33	10
Self-evaluation	39	14

Table 8 above shows that learners used the sub-meta-cognitive strategies of evaluating their learning. Learners used the evaluation sets of self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Above average learners evaluated their learning much more than the below average ones. The study found a strong relationship between all evaluation sets of strategies and performance. These evaluation sets have further been discussed and analysed in the sections that follow.

4.3.3.1 Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring means checking, verifying and correcting one's comprehension or performance in the course of a language task (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Oxford (1990) defines it as the noticing and correcting of learners' own errors in any of the language skills.Table 8 shows that 33 above average and 10 below average learners reported using it. This could be because of lack of knowledge about the strategy. The learners reported that they noticed their errors in the four language skills and corrected them. As evidence of this statement, a below average learner explained:

> *Polankhula kapena polemba ndimakhala ndi kumvetsera mmutumu kuti ndikonze zolakwika.* For example *ndimaiwala kuti popereka moni masana ndimati* good morning *mmalo monena kuti* good afternoon. *Koma ukamaganiza umakonza pompo. Ndikakumbukira nditanena kale ndimayesetsa kuti ndisabwerezenso* mistake *imeneyo.* (I become attentive to myself so that when I notice a mistake I should correct it. For example when greeting my friends, in the afternoon I always say *good morning* instead of *good afternoon* but through monitoring I review it. Sometimes I realize a long time after speaking and I make sure that I do not repeat the same mistake). (Learner 2, Bomba secondary school, 3/10/2010)

The statements indicate that the few below average learners monitored their skills in language learning although lack of adequate practice strategies as previously stated hindered them. The only problem was lack of memory and knowledge of a number of grammar rules and vocabulary which made them fail to notice many errors when speaking and writing. The above average learners also reported that they monitored their language strictly. This agrees with Krashen's (1985) monitor hypothesis which states that before a learner produces an utterance, he or she internally scans it for errors and uses the learned system to make corrections. Commenting on self monitoring, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndimaona ndi kukonza pomwe ndalakwitsa polankhula, kulemba ndi zina zonse. Mwa chitsanzo pa* speaking *ndimakhala ndikuganiza za* grammar *monga ma* tense. *Ndikaona kuti ndalakwitsa chifukwa choiwala kapena kungophonyetsa ndimakonza pompo kapena nthawi ina. Polemba ma* composition *ndimaona zolakwa zanga pa* draft *ndipo ndimakonza polemba ya* final. *Izitu zimandithandiza kupeza marks okwera pa* composition. (I notice and correct my errors in all the four language skills. For example, when speaking, I think of the grammar rules like verb tenses and when I notice an error because of forgetting the right word or just a slip of the tongue, I correct instantly or later on my own. When writing compositions, I notice errors in my draft or before handing in my work and then correct them. This helps me to get higher marks in my compositions). (Learner 5 Aliko secondary school 2/10/2010)

However, Oxford (1990) states that learners should not become obsessed with correcting every speech difficulty because this would kill communication. The study found a strong relationship between self monitoring and performance because learners who reported that they self- monitored themselves during communication and after completing a task performed highly. Self-monitoring assisted them to think of using better strategies on given tasks in order to improve their performance. Commenting on the below average and performance, a teacher said:

> Learners use the monitoring strategy and it enhances performance especially in writing and reading comprehension which are examined. This works better with the above average learners who have enough knowledge of the language. Some below average learners monitor their language skills but it does not assist them to perform successfully because they lack the knowledge of the language and it results in monitoring incorrectly. (Teacher 1, Chombo secondary school, 11/10/2010)

From these statements, there is need to train learners to monitor their language or involve critical friends to assist them especially in reading and comprehension and writing. This can fulfil Vygotsky's theory which states that learning occurs in social groupings.

4.3.3.2 Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation means checking the outcomes of one's own language performance against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). With reference to Table 8, only 23 above average and 11 below average learners reported they used this strategy. Learners reported that they judged their overall execution of a task. Learners compared their grades with their friends' and analyzed what went wrong and what to do next in order to improve. For example, they improved their grades by studying harder. Commenting on evaluation of one's learning, an above average learner explained:

> *Pakutha pa* term *kapena tsiku, ndimakhala pansi kuganiza ma* strengths *ndi ma* weakness *ndi choti ndichite. Mwachitsanzo, ndimachita* compare marks *a* term *ino ndi yathayi komanso position. Kenako ndimachita* compare *ma* grades *a anzanga. Kenaka ndimaonanso ngati ndakwera kapena kutsika. Kenako ndimaganiza chifukwa chomwe ma*grades *anga atsika ndi choti ndichite. Ndimachita izi kuti ndilimbikire kwambiri ndikusiya makhalidwe olepheretsa monga kuchita* miss *makalasi, kusamvetsera ndi kusawerenga mokwanira.* (At the end of the day or term, I sit down to think of my strengths and weaknesses and what to do. For example, I compare my terminal grades and class position with the previous ones. I also compare the grades with my friends' then find out if I have improved or not. I sit down and think of the causes of my low grades and find solutions. This could be to work extra hard and stop behaviours which contribute to failure like missing classes, not paying attention and inadequate studying). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 21/09/2010)

The below average learners also self-evaluated their learning in order to succeed. Out of 48 below average learners, 11 reported that they evaluated their learning and knew whether they were improving or not. Others said they did not because they always got a low grade.

Commenting on self evaluation, a below average learner explained:

> *Ndimaona mmene zinthu zikuyendera tikalandira mapepala a mayeso ndi za mkalasi. Ndikalandira* test paper *ndimatenga la mzanga ndikuchita* correction *kuti ndisadzalepherenso zomwezo.* (I self-evaluate my learning after tests or language activities. I receive the papers and borrow my friends' to make corrections so that I should not fail the same question again). (Aliko secondary school, 18/09/2010)

> *Ine sindichita stock za mmene maphunziro akuyendera chifukwa* marks *anga ndi omweo otsika pa* test *iri yonse. China nso ndi choti sitimadziwa kuti kuona mmene zinthu zikuyendera ndikofunika pa maphunziro.* (I do not evaluate my learning because I know it is always a low grade in every test. The other reason is that I did not know that evaluating is important in learning. (Chombo CDSS, 17/09/2010)

In the above quotations, the first learner said he evaluated his learning and acted by just copying a friend's right answers instead of being very active to understand the material during revision by the teacher. He also does not think of hard working as an important action. This shows that the learner evaluated his overall progress but did not care much of improving it. In the last statements, the learner said he did not evaluate his learning but knew where he was as a below average learner. This shows that many learners evaluated their learning though unconsciously. Learners lacked motivation and self-efficacy to improve. This led to failure in performance. All in all, the below average checked their overall outcomes on performance in the four language skills but because of persistent failure, they could not take proper action. The role of the teachers in such cases is to motivate this type of learners.

Finding out from teachers about self-evaluation, one of them said:

> Self-evaluation in all the four language skills help learners to identify specific areas where they need more support and can seek help from teachers or peers. To the above average learners, success breeds confidence. Self-evaluation encourages them to set higher goals and commit more effort to them to improve their performance.To the below average, evaluation is there but instead of breeding confidence, it breeds negative emotions leading to hating English lessons and teachers and laziness. This promotes their failure. (Teacher 2, Dowe CDSS, 13/08/2010)

The above excerpt shows that self-evaluation of one's learning followed by a positive action improved learners' performance.The below average learners just reported that they evaluated but did not act to change for improvement. All teachers suggested that learners self-valuated and improved their performance if tests and class work were given frequently. Teachers who tested their learners at the end of the term only hindered their learners from frequent evaluation and hard work to compete. From the above sentiments, learners need to be taught how to evaluate their learning and take action because many do not know that self-evaluation is an important language learning strategy. For self-evaluation to take place frequently, teachers should try to give daily exercises and frequent testing in all the four language skills and not ignoring compositions despite having large classes.

In summary of meta-cognitive strategies, it was revealed that learners used the meta-cognitive strategies of paying attention, planning and evaluating their learning. The study found a strong relationship between all the meta-cognitive strategies and performance.

4.4 Affective strategies used by learners

The study found that learners used affective strategies in order to learn English. The study found a weak relationship between all the affective strategies and performance. These are summarized in Table 9 and the following sections.

Table 9: Affective strategies used by learners

Affective Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Lowering one's anxiety	15	33
Taking one's emotional Temperature	31	30

With reference to Table 9, 15 above average and 33 below average learners used the affective strategy of lowering one's anxiety. Out of 96 learners, 31 above average and 30 below average learners used the strategy of taking one's emotional temperature. There were variations between the above and below average learners in the use of lowering one's anxiety as a strategy. The below average used it highly. There was also a nearly balanced use of the strategy of taking emotional temperature by the above and below average learners. The sub-affective strategies which learners used will further be discussed in the sections that follow.

4.4.1 Lowering one's anxiety

According to table 10, learners used lowering one's anxiety as an affective strategy.

It was highly used by the below average learners who reported:

> *Kuchita mantha ndi kuyankhula chizungu pagulu, kulephera kumva, mayeso, kutikonza polankhula chizungu pa gulu ndi kutifunsa mafunso amene sitidziwa mayankho ake kumatichititsa kukhala ndi nkhawa ndi mantha pophunzira.* (The fear of communicating orally, public speaking, non comprehension, tests, public error correction by teacher and frequent asking questions whose answers we do not know increase our anxiety). (Focus groups 1 and 2, Chombo CDSS 11/09/2010)

This quote is in line with Jarkovic (2008) who found out that the below average learners become more anxious and tensed-up when learning the language and that was why they used this strategy most. This was unlike the above averages learners who were free to learn without fear of being criticized or laughed at when using the language to participate. To lower their anxiety, learners reported that they used two sets of strategies. These were: knowing that they were not alone in their fears and beliefs and relaxing after classes. These are summarized in Table 10 and the following sections.

Table 10: Lowering anxiety as an effective strategy

Lowering anxiety Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Knowing that they were not alone in their fears	18	33
Relaxing after Classes	10	35

With reference to the Table 10 learners used the strategies of knowing that they were not alone in their fears and relaxing after classes in order to lower their anxiety. All these affective sets were highly used by the below average learners than above average

learners. The findings revealed a weak relationship between all the lowering anxiety strategies which learners used because most of the below average who used them failed in their performance. These sub-affective sets have been discussed further in the sections that follow.

4.4.1.1 Knowing that they were not alone in their fears

Learners reported that they reduced their anxiety by knowing that they were not alone in their fears and beliefs as a strategy. This strategy was reported by the learners but it has not been reported in the literature by different authors. Table 10 shows that out of 96 learners interviewed and observed 18 above average and 33 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the below average ones used it more than the above average ones. Teachers reported that the below average learners used this strategy more because they were the ones who had difficulties in English language learning. These difficulties made them have fears and become apprehensive when learning English and they resorted to this strategy to overcome their fears. This strategy helped them in that they did not bother even if friends laughed at them because of their being less knowledgeable. This caused them to have a relaxed classroom environment and increase their risk taking in different tasks. As evidence to this fact, below average learners at a focus group said:

> *Mantha ndi nkhawa pophunzira zimachepa tikadziwa kuti tonse mavuto athu ndi amodzi, aliyense ndi ophunzira. Izi zimatipangitsa kumasuka ndi kusangalala ngakhale timalephera mkalasi pongodziwa kuti vuto lathu ndi limodzi.*

(We lower our anxiety by merely knowing that we are all in the same boat. This makes us to relax and laugh with friends even if we fail to perform in the classroom. (Chombo CDSS, 7/08/2010)

These learners reported that knowing that they were not alone in their condition reduced their anxiety and led to the formation of well structured groups to discuss their condition. For example, they could discuss questions before a test. The above average learners who did not use this strategy much reported that they did not care because their aim was to make a difference by not being in the same situation of having fears. One above average learner said:

Ndimakonda kukhala omasuka ndi osaopa kanthu pophunzira English. *Ine ndine wosiyana ndi amene amachita mantha koma ndiri ngati amene amachita* aim high *kuti akhoze kwambiri.* (I like being a free person and I do not have fears when learning the language. I am not in the same situation with those who fear but with those who aim high to succeed). (Aliko secondary school 15/08/2010)

Another above average learner who used this strategy commented:

Timakhala wokondwa poona kuti tonse ndi chimodzimodzi koma tikafika pa zokhoza mkalasi timayesetsa kuti paoneke kusiyana polimbikira kwambiri. (*We* feel happy to see that we are not alone in our fears as learners but when it comes to performance, we strive to make a difference by competing through hard work). (Dowe Secondary School, 17/09/2010)

However, teachers reported that this strategy had a weak relationship with performance because it was the below average who used it most and still failed.

Concurring with this, a teacher explained:

> Sometimes learners' knowing that they were not alone failing in the classroom discouraged hardworking. It resulted into learners taking their failures lightly and labelling English as difficult. This also discouraged them to try harder. (Chombo secondary school, 27/08/2010)

From the above statements the above average learners did not use this strategy much because most of them reported that they did not fear to communicate orally, tests or public corrections. The below average ones used this strategy always but it did not help them to enhance their performance. Instead it affected them negatively by not working hard and not being concerned with their failure. This suggests that praising those who perform very well in class and announcing their grades could assist learners to know that all learners are not the same. This can encourage others to improve.

4.4.1.2 Using relaxation to lower their anxiety

Learners reported that they lowered their anxiety by relaxing after classes. With reference to Table 10, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 10 above average and 35 below average learners used this strategy. As in many affective strategies, below average learners were rated highly in the use of relaxation as a strategy. Teachers reported that relaxing is good and easy and that was why lazy learners liked it. Learners joined school activities and religious societies in order to relax and lower their anxiety. These included listening to and singing hymns and playing different games like football and basket ball to stretch their muscles.

Commenting on the use of relaxing, both below and above average learners reported:

> *Timachepetsa nkhawa za kuphunzira pochita ma* exercise *monga mpira, kuimba ndi kuseka ndi anzathu.* (We lower our anxiety by relaxing through exercises like football, singing and laughing with friends). (Focus group 2, Dowe CDSS, 7/08/2009)

They also reported that they used laughter to relax by sharing jokes with friends. Answering on how they solved linguistic challenges, one below average learner explained.

> *Kukambirana ndi mzako vuto lako pophunzira English limapepuka. Mwachitsanzo ukalephera* test. (Talking it out with a friend about a language problem makes it half solved, for example one's poor performance during a test). (Chombo CDSS, 12/09/2010)

Learners reported that talking it out and joking helped to reduce uncomfortable feelings of nervousness and worries about their English language learning. Watching movies and drama during the weekends also helped them to laugh, relax and reduce their anxiety. They forgot their weaknesses in language a bit and then started a-fresh with vigour later. Commenting on relaxing as a way of lowering anxiety, a female teacher explained:

> Books say relaxing is a strategy for reducing anxiety but if overdone, it can lead to under performance. For example, learners keep phones with radios privately and these can make them lazy by just thinking of when a class will end so that they can go and relax by listening to music. Knowing the saying that "too much work with no play made Jack a dull boy", the school, organized relaxing time. For example, sports day and religious organization days where they relax by singing every week. But to say the truth, it does not mean that this can improve performance especially in our context. (Teacher, Aliko secondary school, 27/09/2010)

4.4.2 *Taking one's emotional temperature*

Taking ones emotional temperature means self-assessment involving getting in touch with feelings, attitudes and motivations through a variety of means (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 10, out of the 96 learners interviewed, 31 above average and 30 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the strategy was highly used by all the learners. The below average used this strategy more highly compared to other non affective strategies. This was because they were the ones who were tensed up when learning the language from encountering a lot of difficulties and they just resorted to taking their emotional temperature. The strategies which learners used have been summarized in Table 11 and the following sections.

Table 11: Taking emotional temperature as an affective strategy

Taking one's emotional temperature as a strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Listening to one's body	28	33
Discussing feelings with someone else	34	27

To take their emotional temperature, learners used the strategies of listening to their body and discussing their feelings with someone else. Below average learners used listening to one's body more highly than the above average learners. There was only a slight difference in the use of discussing feelings with others as a strategy by both learners. The

study revealed a weak relationship between all the two sub-affective strategies and performance. These sub-strategies will further be discussed in the following sections.

4.4.2.1 *Listening to one's body*

Listening to one's body means paying attention to signals given by the body. The signals learners can pay attention to may be negative reflecting stress, tension, worry, fear and anger; or they may be positive indicating happiness, interest, calmness and pleasure (Oxford, 1990). Learners reported that they listened to their bodies by resting when they were sick, tired, stressed up, angered or tensed up. They also listened to their bodies when they were happy or interested. With reference to Table 11, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 28 above average and 33 below average learners used this strategy. The numbers show great use of the strategy by below average learners. These were the ones who lagged behind in many strategies in the study. Teachers stated that the high use by the below average could be because of the difficulties they faced in language learning and laziness which caused them to listen to their bodies often. This concurs with Jarkovic (2008) who in his study found that the less proficient learners highly resorted to listening to their bodies as a strategy. In evidence of listening to their bodies, one above average learner said:

> *Ndimamvetsera thupi langa ndikamadwala mutu chifukwa chowerenga kwambiri. Ndimazipatsa nthawi yopuma kuwerenga. Sinditaya nthawi ndipo ndimayesetsa kumwa mankhwala.*(I listen to my body when I have a headache after studying for a long time, I give myself a bit of relaxation after short schedules of my studies. I do not take too long and I make sure I take some medicine). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

Commenting on listening to their body, a below average learner also said:

> *Ndikasangalala kwambiri monga tikakhala pafupi kutsiriza* term *kuti tizipita ndimangoona ngati kutaya nthawi kuti ndzilowa mkalasi. Ndimalongezeratu pakangotsala milungu itatu. Ndikakhala kuti ndatopa kapena kukhumudwa ndimangonamizira kudwala kuti ndipume kulowa mkalasi.* (When I am too happy for example when the term has come to an end and we are about to go home, I just find it a waste of time to attend classes. I pack my things three weeks before closure. When I am tired or worried about something, I pretend to be sick, so that I can rest without attending classes). (Dowe secondary school, 1/10/2010)

With reference to the above statements, the above average learner used this strategy normally and it assisted him to resume work strongly. It also shows that the learner did not like being sick to relax. The below average used this strategy negatively in order to keep on relaxing. That was why the number of below average learners who listened to their bodies as a strategy rose up compared to the above average ones. All teachers reported that this strategy cannot be encouraged because many learners like relaxing. In evidence of this a teacher explained:

> Listening to the body is a good strategy because after attending to the requests of the body to rest one resumes learning with strength. Forcing the body to work does not work because you take time to do simple activities. However, this strategy is not emphasized because some learners especially the below average are lazy and take advantage of this strategy to over rest. This leads to their failure. (Teacher 1, Bomba secondary school, 2/10/2010)

As expressed by the teacher, the study found a weak relationship between listening to the body and performance because sometimes it was overdone.The above average learners who did not use it much preformed highly while the below average ones who used it frequently failed to perform well. Some learners always found small reasons to relax. The

below average ones used this most frequently because they accompanied it with laziness. The statements indicate that listening to one's body is a helpful and health promoting strategy. Teachers have the duty of knowing their learners' behaviours. There is also a need to advise learners on the importance of saying the truth because we have heard of learners being ignored while sick up to the point of death because of their' previous frequent lies in order to listen to their bodies.

4.4.2.2 Discussing feelings with someone else

Learners took their emotional temperature by discussing their feelings about language learning with their friends, teachers and others. Learners reported that language learning was not easy and they needed to discuss the challenges with others. Learners reported the challenges which triggered their emotions including teachers favouring others when teaching and marking tests; making unfair comparisons between learners and others; low marks earned and ill remarks from fellow learners among others. Learners improved their emotional temperature by discussing their language learning problems and what to do with friends. As evidence of this, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndinali okhumudwa chifukwa chomangolephera note making komanso ndi ma comments a aphunzitsi kuti ndiri* dull. *Ndinali pafupi kulira koma mzanga ananditonthoza kuti aphunzitsi amenewa ambiri amawadandaula koma njira yabwino ndi kuiwala ndi kuyamba kulimbikira. Mzangayu anandibwereka buku la ku library lofotokoza bwino* note-making *ndipo ndinayamba kumvetsa. Kuyambira pompo aphunzitsi aja anasanduka amzanga.(*I was very disappointed when I kept on failing note-making and the teacher's remarks in which she said I was dull. I nearly cried but my friend counselled me to say I was not the only one who complained about that teacher and the best way was to forget about her and work hard. She lent me a nice book from the library on note making and I improved. Since then the teacher turned to out to be my friend). (Bomba secondary school, 7/09/2010)

This statement shows that friends encouraged the learner to work hard leading to improved performance. This also achieves Vygotsky's theory concerning the Zone of Proximal Development which says learning becomes successful when the knowledgeable assist the less knowledgeable. Asking the below average how discussing feelings with others helped them a below average learner explained:

> Discussing feelings with friends is important *chifukwa pamalo pamakoma ndi anzako kuti azikuthandiza zochita.* For example, *mumakambirana za kukhosi komanso ngati wapalamula kuofesi.* (Discussing feelings with friends is important because they assist you on what to do. For example, you discuss private things and also when you have a case to answer at the office). (Learner 8, Aliko secondary school, 14/09/2010)

The statement by the below average learner shows that friends were not mainly there to help them in their language learning but for chatting and personal advice. This shows that the friends did not assist them to improve their performance. Asking teachers whether discussing feelings improved learners' performance, a teacher said:

> Sometimes discussing feelings helped especially to the above average who valued their learning most. To the below average who valued chatting and misbehaving, most of the times they discussed things which were not related to learning. (Teacher 1 Chombo secondary school 17/09/2010)

The above statement shows that the below average who used the strategy most did not use it for learning. This means although their worries were reduced, they could not perform highly. The study found a weak relationship between discussing learners feelings about language with others because not all discussions resulted in the learners improvement in learning. Out of 8 teachers, 6 reported that some learners counselled their friends and advised them to react negatively leading to more frustrations.

In summary, the study found that all affective strategies did not promote high performance. This is in line with Mullins (1992) who found a weak relationship between affective strategies and admission test scores. The above average learners that used them were successful because they mixed them with other strategies.

4.5 Social strategies used by learners

The study revealed that learners used social strategies in order to learn English. A strong relationship between one social strategy use and performance was found. The social strategies learners used will be discussed in reference to Table 12 and the following sections.

Table 12: Social strategies used by learners

Social Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Asking questions	39	18
Cooperating with others	28	30

Table 12 shows the social strategies which above and below learners used. Learners used the sub-strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others. Out of the two, the study found a strong relationship between asking questions and performance. The social strategies learners used will be discussed in relation to Table 12.

4.5.1 Asking questions

Out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 39 above average learners and 18 below average learners used this sub-social strategy. This shows that it was the above average learners who used this strategy more than the below average ones. The above average learners said that they asked more questions in order to understand and perform better. Commenting on the importance of questions on performance, an above average learner said:

> *Kufunsa aphunzitsi ndi anzathu kumatithandiza kuchita bwino pa mayeso chifukwa zinthu zomwe sitizimvetsa zimanveka akamatithandiza payekhapayekha.* (Asking questions to our teachers and fellow learners help us to perform better during examinations because issues which are not clear in class are also clarified during individual help). (Learner 4, Dowe CDSS, 17/09/2010)

Learners were observed asking the teacher and fellow learners what to do in the classroom. They always asked for clarification, repetition and verification. Commenting on the importance of asking, a below average learner explained:

> When we are not clear, we ask the teacher or friend to repeat, paraphrase, explain, slow down or give examples. This helps us to understand what we learn. (Focus group 1, Chombo CDSS 8/09/2010)

It was revealed that inadequate knowledge of English made below learners tense and not free to ask questions. They feared being laughed at by fellow learners. Lack of understanding also made the below average learners not to ask many questions. The other reason was that many of them were not actively following the lesson.

Interviewing the learners who were not asking questions, both above and below average learners explained:

> *Kukhala opanda mafunso ndiye kuti palibe vuto, zamveka. Koma nthawi zina timasiya osafunsa kuopa kusokoneza maplan ndi nthawi kwa aphunzitsi komanso kuopa kwataitsa nthawi amene akutsatira bwinobwino. Tikakhala ndi vuto lalikulu timangokaonana nawo aphunzitsi kapena anzathu patokha.*
> (Lack of questions means there is no problem with the language task. Sometimes we reserve some questions to avoid disturbing the teachers' time plans and wasting time for those who follow the lesson. We just opt for meeting the teacher or friends privately if it is a serious clarification). (Focus group 2, Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Finding out from teachers about asking of questions, a teacher explained:

> The above average learners ask questions to understand the content. Sometimes they know the content but they ask when they see that the teacher is not prepared or has gone astray somewhere. This encourages teachers to prepare their work thoroughly resulting into improvement of the learning process. The below average do not ask questions in the classroom much because of their language deficit and they are free to ask outside in Chichewa. Sometimes they do not ask because of lack of understanding. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 18/09/2010)

Interviewing and observing teachers and learners revealed that there was a strong relationship between asking questions and performance because those who asked questions got the right information leading to high performance. The knowledgeable assisted the less knowledgeable ones. This is in line with Vygotsky's constructivist theory [1896-1934] (1962) which states that learning occurs in social groupings and that those who are more knowledgeable tend to help the less knowledgeable ones to become knowledgeable through scaffolding process.

4.5.2 *Cooperating with others*

Cooperating means working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information or model a language activity (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). This involves cooperating with peers and proficient users of English. With reference to Table 12 the sub-strategy of cooperating with others was used by 28 above average and 30 below average learners. This shows that the below average used it more highly than the above average ones. Finding out from teachers why the below average learners preferred cooperative learning more than the above average ones, it was revealed that the below average learners were not active and relied on the above average to find answers for them. However, one below average learner said:

> *Kuphunzira pamodzi pagulu kumatithandiza kwambiri chifukwa timaphunzira zambiri kuchokera kwa anzathu. Timaphunzira ndi kuchita* practise *bwino kuposanso tikakhala ndi aphunzitsi.* (Learning together in groups helps us very much because we learn a lot from friends. We ask and practice English better with friends than the teacher). (Chombo CDSS, 19/09/2010)

Although Vygotsky (1962) stressed that learning occurs in a social grouping, the study found a weak relationship between cooperating with others and performance. This was evidenced from the below average learners who liked it most but failed to reach the satisfactory levels of performance because they failed to learn meaningfully. They performed better in team work because of the above average learners. On their own, they failed to retrieve what they learnt during tests and examinations because it was the above average learners who were doing the work for them. For example, in group compositions the below average learners lacked self-efficacy and left everything in the hands of the

MALAWI COLLECTION

above average ones to write. Commenting on cooperative learning, one of the above average learners said:

> *Ndimakonda kuphunzira kwa gulu pa* speaking, listening *ndi reading pang'ono. Sindikonda kulemba kwa gulu pa ntchito yoti aphunzitsi akachonge monga note making ndi composition chifukwa ndimangolemba ndekha kapena awiri basi. Ena salemba nawo kapena kumvetsera. Amangofuna kulandira* marks *aulere. Nthawi zina gulu lathu limalephera chifukwa chosathadizana ndi kugwirizana.* (I like cooperative learning in speaking listening and partly reading. I do not like team writing on work which will be graded by the teacher especially note making and compositions because it is mostly done by one or two of us. The rest do not get involved to do the exercise or even to learn. Others like to get a free grade. Sometimes our group fails because of lack of effort to work together). (Dowe CDSS, 17/09/2010)

It was revealed that cooperative learning worked better in schools which had learners who were selected on merit than those schools whose learners just found places after failing the national examinations. This was because those selected on merit shared ideas and the knowledgeable assisted those who failed and less knowledgeable. In schools where learners who did not do very well were selected to (CDSSs), very few were knowledgeable to assist others. For example, in some groups, it was observed that no one was knowledgeable enough to assist others. This resulted into learners hating participatory learning and not being motivated to learn English. Because of the history of learner's examination failure at a particular school, many below average learners thought they failed because of the school they were at. In evidence of this, one teacher reported that their school (Chombo CDSS) was nicknamed *Nangantani* (what shall I do?) because it was only those parents who had no money for private schools who sent their learners at this school. This gave a chance to those who failed the national examinations to get

places in such schools resulting into an increase in the number of below average learners. Learners admitted to such schools lacked the motivation that they were going to succeed learning from the history of the school. Many groups could not assist each other because all were not knowledgeable. In the few groups with some knowledgeable learners, they were the ones who dominated and the other members were not active. The others were passive because the content was not of their level and they found it too difficult for them. Out of eight teachers, five reported that in schools with large classes, lack of resources and many below average learners, cooperative learning failed to achieve its goal. Samida (2004) states that co-operation with others eliminates competition and in its place brings group spirit. However, it was reported by teachers that most of the above average learners did not like cooperative learning because in the target schools there was a strong emphasis on competition. This is also in line with Jurkovic (2008) who found that learners who are successful rarely value cooperative learning. Commenting on cooperating with others, a teacher argued:

> The above average practice cooperative learning because they want to obey; it is one of the demands of the curriculum and because of the shortage of resources. They feel like being delayed to work in teams because they do not benefit anything from the below average who depend on them to perform without understanding. (Chombo secondary school, 15/09/2010)

Limited autonomy by the below average learners meant a lot of dependence from the teacher and peers. For example, during observation at Dowe secondary school, a learner who failed to answer a question was simultaneously given the correct answer in a whisper by a friend. In this case, it showed that cooperation impeded the below average learners from involving their mental processes seriously. Finally, the study found a weak

relationship between cooperating with others and performance because the below average ones who liked it most failed. Large classes, high number of incompetent learners, inadequate supervision from teachers among others made cooperative learning not to achieve its goals.

In summary of social strategies, the study found that learners used the social strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others. It was revealed that asking questions as a strategy enhanced performance. Cooperating with others failed to enhance performance because of the high number of below average learners in CDSSs, high competition among learners and large classes. Teachers have the duty of varying teaching methods to suit all learners' performance. Individual exercises should also be given after groups to make all learners involved.

4.6 Chapter summary

The chapter has analysed and discussed data that was sourced from secondary school teachers of English and form three learners. It has reported that English learners used language learning strategies of cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies and that there is a relationship between language strategy use and performance. The above average learners scored highly in the use of cognitive, meta-cognitive and asking questions as a social strategy. The below average learners used compensation, affective and cooperative strategies highly. The study found that all meta-cognitive strategies and cognitive strategies of practising, reviewing work done, note taking and summary and the social strategy of asking questions were highly related to

performance. Finally, it was also found that all compensation strategies, cognitive strategies of highlighting and rote memorisation and the social strategy of cooperating with others did not enhance high performance.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Chapter overview

The study investigated the language learning strategies used by learners and how they affected their performance. The key data sources were form three English language teachers and learners. The study involved learners and English teachers in four secondary schools in Zomba Urban. The study used constructivism and mainly the information processing model as a theoretical frame work.

The study was mainly responding to three research questions. These were about the language learning strategies used by learners, how they were used and how the strategies used affected their performance. These questions were answered in Chapter 4 through a comparison of above and below average learners' continuous assessment scores, performance during observation and the language learning strategies they used. This chapter presents the conclusions raised from the findings and makes recommendations which can assist in the teaching and learning of English in schools. Finally, it suggests the areas for further studies.

5.1 Key issues

The study found that many learners had difficulties in acquiring the necessary competences in English as a subject. This agrees with Mmela (2006) who also found that

learners had difficulties in learning English as a second language and many performed poorly. Although various studies have attributed the poor performance to a number of factors, the findings of this study illustrate that the problem also originated from how the learners go about learning, the efforts they put in or in other words, their use of language learning strategies affected their performance.

In response to the first and second research questions, both above and below average learners used cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, social and affective strategies. The study established that above average learners used special sub-strategies most and in an orchestrated manner. It means these strategies, for example, practising and management of study time were very important for learning and could be taught to the below average learners who thrived within the same contextual challenges with the above average but performed poorly. It also means that the difference between the above and below average students was how they managed their time. Many learners failed to be organised all along their education. They performed poorly or less than they could because they started being organised when examinations were near. Difficulty of the material to those who joined the secondary school level without passing well in the national examinations; procrastination and laziness hindered the below average learners from using cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. These were found highly related to performance. They mostly used the language learning strategies which had a weak relationship with performance. For example they used the strategies of relaxing and rote memorization. This means below average learners shunned strategies which highly involved their mental processes and managing their learning which are the most

important strategies in learning. In this study, the findings also mean that large classes, lack of proper planning, organization and supervision by teachers and strong emphasis on competition made cooperative learning which is a social strategy fail to achieve its goal of the knowledgeable assisting the less knowledgeable. This is not in line with constructivism which guides this study. The findings also illustrate that teachers used cooperative learning mainly to solve the problem of inadequate resources and to reduce their work especially during the marking of compositions. Some were not very much concerned about whether learning was taking place or not.

The results also meant that examinations posed obstacles when trying to integrate active learning or learner centred pedagogies into the classroom because more often than not these pedagogies which made learners practice different language learning strategies were seen as ineffective in preparing learners for passing examinations. Passing examinations was the priority for most learners and teachers. It was also found that because of the interest in passing examinations and not in learning, some above and below average learners and even teachers did not put a lot of effort on speaking and listening skills because they were not examined. They could not understand that these skills could indirectly help them pass examinations. The findings mean that most of the learners did not like speaking English. The status of English speaking was very poor. Some teachers also did not like speaking English to their learners as role models. Although some schools tried to force learners to communicate in English, only few mainly those with English speaking backgrounds spoke English satisfactorily.

In response to the third research question, the study established that there was a relationship between the strategies learners used; how they used them and their performance. The use of language learning strategies contributed to the difference between above and below average learners. This concurs with Fewell (2010) who by comparing high and low proficiency learners found that language learning strategies as a variable is a significant determinant of eventual success or failure in language learning. There was a causal reciprocal relationship between strategy use and language performance which indicates that strategy use and language performance are both causes and outcomes of each other. The study has revealed that improper use of language learning strategies is another cause of poor performance among English learners.

5.2 Recommendations

Language learning strategies are very important to learners because they help learners who use them meaningfully to become autonomous and communicatively competent. In view of this, this study makes the following recommendations:

- Teacher training institutions and teachers should reinforce language learning strategy training. There is need for teachers to understand what language learning strategies are how to train learners and which variables affect LLS choice and use. Learners should be trained on language learning strategies beginning at primary school in order to have a good background of how to learn which can result in boosting their performance.

- The Malawi government in conjunction with the Malawi National Examinations Board should consider introducing examinations which should be testing English in all the four language skills including listening and speaking as it was done in French language. This could encourage learners and English language teachers to take speaking and listening more seriously. This could also lead to our learners being more fluent in English.

- Education authorities should provide an enabling environment to facilitate the learning of English. Examples of the enabling environment could be resources and teacher to pupil ratio reduction. This could assist learners to use learner-centred teaching methods easily. These methods help learners to use different language learning strategies.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

- A comparative study on language learning strategies with the rural secondary schools could be carried out for comparison purposes.

- Detailed studies could also be carried out to study few language learning strategies and how they relate to performance at national level in order to come up with results which could be generalised.

REFERENCES

Abraham, R., & Van, R. (1990). Strategies of successful language learners. *TESOL Quarterly, 24(2), 223-234.*

Aijaz, M.S. (2001). *Learning achievement in primary schools of Pakistan: A quest for quality education.* Islamabad: UNESCO.

Arher, J.M., Holy, M.L., & Kasten, M.M. (2001). *Action research for teachers: Travelling the yellow brick road.* Columbus: Prentice Hall

Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your research project: A guide for first time researchers in education and social science* (2nd ed). Buckingham: Open University.

Bogdan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (1988).*Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed). Boston: Allen and Bacon Publishers.

Borg, W.R., & Gall, M.D. (1989). *Education research: An introduction* (5thed.). New York: Longman.

British Council, (1978). *Individualisation in language learning.* London: ETIC Publications.

Brooks, J., & Brooks, M. (1993). *In Search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms.* Alexandra: ASCD.

Cajkler, W., & Adelman, R. (2000). *The practice of foreign language teaching* (2nd ed.). London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Chagunda, A. (2000, August 12-18).Generation. *Malawi news,* 43 (2487), 4

Chamot, A.U. (2003). Issues in language learning strategy research and teaching. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 2004; 1,* (1): 14-26.

Chamot, A., & O'Malley, M. (1994). *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach.* Retrieved at auchamot @ gwu .edu on 15/02/2010.

Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). (Ed). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Chimombo, J.P.G. (2005). Quality versus quantity in education: Case studies in Malawi. *Journal of International review of education (2005)*; 51: 155- 172.

Chimombo, J. Kunje, D. Chimuzu, T., & Mchikoma, C. (2005). *A study conditions of schooling and quality of education in Malawi.* Zomba: The SACMEQ 11 Project in Malawi.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge Falmer.

Cohen, A.D. (1996). Second language learning and use of strategies: Clarifying issues. Minnesota: Minneapolis. Retrieved on 21/09/2011 at www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/resources/ sbiclarify.

Commonwealth Education Fund Strategic Plan for Malawi (2003-2005). Retrieved on 09/7/2009 at http://www.commonwealth education fund.org.

Cresswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research methods*. Oxford: How to Books Ltd.

Department of Research Evaluation & Policy studies Report (2009). *Baseline study on learning achievement of standard 3 and 7 learners in Malawi.* MIE: Domasi.

Diener, E., & Crandal, R. (1978). *Ethics in social and behavioural research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dzama, E.N. (2006). *Malawi secondary school learners' learning of science: Historical background, performance and beliefs.* (Unpublished PhD Thesis) Department of Education, University of Western Cape.

Ehrman, M., & Oxford, R.L. (1990). Adult language learning styles and strategies in an intensive training setting. *Modern language journal*; 74: 311-327.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford university press.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1985). *Strategies in inter-language communication.* New York: Longman Group Ltd.

Fewell, N. (2010). Language learning strategies and English language proficiency: An investigation of Japanese EFL university learners.*TESOL Journal, 159 (2), 159-174.*

Fidderholdt, (1998). Retrieved on19/01/10 from URL : http: // www.*Jalteducation.*

Frankiel, J.R., &Wallen, N.E. (2008). *How to design and evaluate research in education (7th ed).* New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Friends of Malawi, (2004). *Building ties between Malawi and America, one village at a time: Education.* Retrieved on14/04/2011 fromD:/friends of Malawi; About Malawian geography.mht

Harvey, P. (1985). A lesson to be learnt: Chinese approaches to language learning. *ELT Journal,39(3),* 183-186.

Jurkovic, V. (2008). *Language learner strategies and language competence: A case study in the Slovene Higher Education area.* (Unpublished doctoraldissertation). Ljubljana: Filozofska Fakulteta.

Kalong, R.A. (2008). *Code- switching.* Retrieved on 20/01/2012 at www.fp.utm.../pdf fail/...rebeccaidaApc040264D2008ttpS

Kholowa, F.A.C. (1999). *Between two worlds: Conflict between Malawi teachers' pedagogic paradigm and assessment needs of their context: How do they resolve*

it? (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of East Anglia.

Kishindo, E., Susuwele, W., Ndalama, L.,& Mwale, L.(2005).*Assessing learner achievement in English, Chichewa, mathematics and science in standards 3,5, and 7 in Malawian primary schools.* Domasi: Malawi.

Krashen, S.D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications.* New York: Longman.

Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd.

Lee, C.K. (2010). An overleaf of language learning strategies. *ERECLS,* 7, 132-152.

Lipenga, M. (2011). *Exploring the teaching methods and strategies that are used in primary schools for the development of language proficiency.* (Unpublished MEd dissertation). Zomba: University of Malawi.

Livingston, L. (1997). *Meta-cognition: An overview*. Retrieved on 10/09/2011 from http://www,gse.buffalo.edu/fus/shuel/cep564/metacog.htm.

Llurda, E. (2011). On competence, proficiency and communicative language ability. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 10(1), 2000 –85.

Magogwe, J., & Oliver, R. (2007). The Relationship between language learning: Botswana system. *An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied linguistics, 35, 338-352.*

Malawi Institute of Education, (2002). *Senior secondary school English Syllabus.* Zomba: Domasi.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Matiki, A. (2001). The Social Significance of English in Malawi. *World Englishes,* 20 (2), 201-218.

Mayer, R.E. (2004). "Should there be a three strikes rule against pure discovery learning?" *American psychologist 59 (1), 14-19.*

McKeachy, W.J. (1988). *The need for study strategy training.* Houghton: Mifflin company.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Case study research in deduction: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco CA: Jossey- Bass

Miller, G.A. (2003).The cognitive revolution: A historical perspective: *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 7, 141-145.

Miller, G.A. (1956). *The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information.* Retrieved on 11/09/2011 at http://www.well.com/user/smalin/miller.html

Mmela, E. (2006). *Implementing integrated literacy approaches in an English classroom in Malawi.*(Doctoral Thesis Presented to Polytechnic Institution 2006). Retrieved on 29/04/2012 at http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/mmelapdf.

MoEST, (2008). *National education sector Virginia plan (2008-2011)*. Lilongwe: Malawi.

Mullins, P. (1992). Successful English language learning strategies of students enrolled at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkom University, Bankok.Thailand: *Dissertation Abstracts International, 53 (6), 1829 A (UMI 9233758).*

Ngwira, N. (2010). An investigation of learning strategies in learning school biology. (Unpublished Master of Educationdissertation). Zomba: University of Malawi.

Nisbet, J., & Shucksmith, J. (1986). *Learningstrategies.* London: Routledge & Kegan Publications.

O'Malley, M., & Chamot, A.U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.* Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Ozel, A. (2009). The practice of information processing model in teaching of cognitive strategies. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, March 2009.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Presidential Committee on Quality Education (2000). *Quality of education final draft.* Lilongwe: Malawi.

Radwan, A.A. (2011). Effects of L2 proficiency and gender on choice of language learning strategies by university learners majoring in English. *Asian EFL Journal.* Retrieved on 14/09/2011 at http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/pdf/march-2011-aar.pdf.

Rossman, G.B., & Rallis, S.F. (2003). *Learning in the fields: Introduction to qualitative research.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Samida, D.K. (2004). *Language learning strategies.* Retrieved on 14/12/2011 at libro.do-bunkyodal.ac.jp/research/pdf/treatises05/01samidaa.pd.

Shmais, W.A. (2003). Language learning strategy use in Palestine. *TESL-EJ, 7(2), 1-17.*

Stern, H.H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, H.H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarone, E. (1977). Conscious communication strategies in inter-language: A progress report. *Tesol, 77,194-203.*

UNESCO. (2000).*The Dakar framework for action, education for all: Meeting our collective commitments.* Adopted by the World Education Forum Dakar, Senegal, 26-27 April, 2000 including six regional frameworks for action. France: UNESCO.

Vermont, H.D. (1996). Meta-cognitive, cognitive and affective aspects of learning styles and strategies: a phenomenological analysis. *Higher Education*, 31, (pp 25-50).Retrieved on 21 August2011from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447707.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press, retrieved on 10/03/2010 from http://.tip.psychology .html.

Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (1987). (Eds). *Learner strategies in language learning.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice- Hall International.

Wisker, G. (2008). *The post graduate Research Handbook.* (2nd ed). Basingstoke: Pal grave Macmillan.

Ya- ling –Wu, (2008). Language learning strategies used by students at different proficiency levels. *Asian EFL Journal.* Retrieved on 10/03/2012 from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com Dec._08_yhw.php

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for learners

1. What are your favourite subjects?

2. Which areas of English do you face a lot of challenges in?

3. Why is English an important subject to learn?

4. English being so important in Malawi, What do you do to overcome the problems you face in English?

- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading and comprehension
- vocabulary
- grammar

5. What do you do to show that you are responsible for your learning in and outside theclassroom?

6. You have mentioned different strategies you use to improve your performance in English. How does each of these help you?

7. How do the following affect the strategies you apply?

- Teacher
- your learning styles
- national examinations,
- experience
- motivation
- curriculum

8. How do you modify and increase your learning strategies?

9. How do teachers help in training you on how to learn the different language skills?

10. How do you plan and evaluate your language learning?How do these steps assist you?

11. Can you mention the strategies you use which do not foster language learning ?

12. Which interaction strategies foster or hinder good language learning strategies?

13. Do you set goals to solve your linguistic problems? If so give examples?

14. Which strategies make you become a successful learner?

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for teachers

1. What is the status quo of your learners' performance in English
2. Do you know some language learning strategies?
3. If yes, which ones do you know?
4. How did you know about these?
5. How do you integrate these language learning strategies in your teaching?
6. What language learning strategies do learners use in order to learn
   a. Listening
   b. Reading
   c .Speaking
   d. Writing
7. Which ones foster learning and which ones do not?
8. How do you help learners to acquire the right learning strategies?
9. How do learners take responsibility of their own learning?
10. What do you do to encourage autonomous learning?
11. What steps do you take to help the poor English language learners know how to learn?
12. What challenges do you face in training the learner how to use better language learning strategies

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Dowe CDSS teacher 2, on 06/09/2010

Researcher: How are you sir?

Teacher: I am fine and how are you?

Researcher: I am fine.

Researcher: First I should thank you for accepting to be interviewed. As I have already stated, feel free because everything will be confidential.

Researcher: What is the status quo of your learners' performance in English?

Respondent: Learners have difficulties to acquire the necessary competencies.

Researcher: What evidence do you have to show these difficulties?

Respondent: Today's learners are different from our time. Most of them fail to speak and write English and their compositions are disappointing.

Researcher: Do you know some language learning strategies?

Respondent: Yes I do remember some.

Researcher: Which ones do you remember?

Respondent: I remember Grammar Translation and Suggestopedia

Researcher: Yes, but these are the ones we teachers use to teach.

Researcher: As from the name Learning Strategies they are those steps learners use to learn. In other words, they are the steps learners take in order to learn a language.

Researcher: Can you give an example of what your learners do in order to perform well in English?

Respondent: Studying, being attentive, practising

Researcher: Yes these are what are in other's words called Language Learning Strategies others could be planning, making notes and guessing intelligently. Do yougive room for learners to use these strategies in your teaching?

Respondent: Yes but not quiet

Researcher: How?

Respondent: During teaching, attention is a must and all become attentive. This means it is there and very few disturb. Practising is there but not very successful because of the large number of learners – 100. Studying is there but they do not utilise it. We have a prep. period but they just make noise. It means the chance is given but learners fail to use it. As for guessing intelligently, we give them the chance during comprehension but many fail.

Researcher: What learning language strategies do learners use in order to learn?Or in other words what do learners do in order to learn the following language skills.

LISTENING

Respondent: They pay much attention and high concentration. When they have notunderstood, they ask for clarification immediately. They give feedback like nodding, head movement, facial gesture and eye contact. If you move to another place you move together by their eyes following. Others scribble short notes using skimming and scanning.

Researcher: Do their performance prove this serious listening?

Respondent: Only for the few. Others look attentive because they fear being punished and they just look as we are together. When it comes to questions, such learners fail. For example, those who are below average learners.

SPEAKING

Researcher: What do your learners do inorder to be good speakers?

Respondent: They are required to practice speaking but here the practice is minimal.

Researcher: Why do you think it is minimal?

Respondent: It is becauselearners are not exposed to English language speaking practice at an early age, for example, at nursery school and primary school. The other reason is that there is no enough time to practice speaking in the classroom with the large number of learners and the need to prepare them for examinations. Learners fail to speak because they are

shy and fear to make mistakes. The above average try and we do not over emphasize on their mistakes but we encourage them.

Researcher: Are those the only reasons why learners fail to practice English speaking?

Respondent: The other reason is that we teachers sometimes have a deficiency in English speaking.Fewcommunicate to the learners in English and mostly the English language teachers.

Researcher: Faced with this lack of practice what do you advice the learners do in order to keep on trying?

Respondent: We advice them that English is a Joker. They cannot pass without passing it.

Researcher: During speaking what do the learners do inorder to keep on trying?

Respondent: Some speak simple English and use simple English words. Others code switch where they see that they cannot continue. Others speak slowly so that they think and correct their language during their speaking. Others use gestures or rehearse what they are going to say. Many learners do not try but shun English speaking. For example, the belowaveragelearners fear going to the staff room because of their English deficiency.

WRITING

Researcher: What do learners do in order to be good writers?

Respondent: Learners practice writing. After imparting various writing skills like short story writing, the clever learners are on the fore front to practice.Others improve their writing by wide reading of materials like books, novels, newspapers. They do this to learn how the renowned writers write their work. The above average learners also use creativity and imagination. Others assist each other in groups. Some bring their work to their teachers, to correct them.

Researcher: You have only mentioned about the above average learners what about the below average?

Respondent: They also do the same but slowly and in a disorganised way.

Researcher: Can you explain clearly what the below average do inorder to learn writing skills.

Respondent: They practice writing but they produce poor work. They rely on others to get exercises right. They rarely work out on their own but like copying other people's ideas. They do not practice wide reading. Instead they read seriously or memorise when they hear about examinations. They fail to be creative and imaginative. Others do not hand in assignments.

Researcher: What do you do to encourage the below average to hand in their work?

Respondent: Some teachers punish them but with the size of the classes as you have seen, we do not make follow ups because it turns out to be a relief on the part of marking. We just make sure that the work is revised and they copy the right answers.

READING

Researcher: What do learners do in order to be good at reading?

Respondent: Learners survey, question, read, revise and recite (SQR3R method) a piece of readingbutsometimesit depends on the type of reading. When studying or reading an academic novel, they take notes and summaries of the text in order to understand and remember easily. After that they go to the answering questions related to the reading. It can be set questions according to the sub-topics or past test or examination papers. After that they evaluate their understanding and then go back to revise then recite.

Researcher: What do the learners do if it is a comprehension passage?

Respondent In every type of reading, learners' minds are active throughout. They cannot understand without concentration. When reading a passage, they apply a psycholinguistic process. That is to say they become active by bringing in their experience of the world in which they live to the story.

Researcher: Can you explain with an example on how they bring in these experiences?

Respondent: Readers think along with the writer. For example, we were reading a passage on early marriages. The learners liked the passage because they could easily relate to what happens in their society. They could ask themselves why thecharacters were behaving like that, what they could do if they were a character and if it was really practical.

Researcher: Are those the only strategies learners use during reading?

Respondent: As already said learners survey the passage, go to the questions section, read attentively then go back to answer the questions. In addition, learners

are able to analyse and evaluate events as a high order of bloom's taxonomy. They are also able to infer meanings of difficult words and imply from the context.

Researcher: I have seen that learners use different strategies inorder to perform successfully in English. You have told me that learners think, practice, take notes, memorise,code-switch, guess intelligently, shun communication, speak slowly, plan, pay attention, work together, ask questions, summarise and evaluate. I would like to know which ones of the language learning strategies aboveenhance performance and which ones do not and why. I will be asking you strategy by strategy.

Researcher: You said learners practice the four language skills. Does practiceenhance their performance?

Respondent: Practice enhances performance because the learners who practice and learn by doing perform highly. For example, practice in writing makes them have more knowledge and promote memory.

Researcher: What about note- taking and summarising

Respondent: Note taking and summarising enhances performance but only fewlearners know how to take notes and summaries. Many learners have problems to make notes and summaries but those who are intelligent know how to make them and are the successful.

Researcher: Does rote memorization enhance performance?

Respondent: Rote memorization enhances temporary performance.

Things which cannot be remembered through studying with understanding are memorized for the sake of the examinations and they forget them soonafter the examination.

Respondent: Can you give examples of such things? Which should be memorised?

Respondent: Learners increase their performance memorizing long lists and confusing grammar, for example, the order of adjectives in a noun phrase phrasal verbs and prepositions.

Researcher: Can we say rote memorization is the right strategy of learning?

Respondent: No, learners need to understand the material. This is done through working hard all the time. This strategy only helps when the learners especially the below average are stranded and examinations are near.

Researcher: Does it enhance high performance?

Respondent: No to those who rely on it but yes when accompanied with other strategies and if it is done only on confusing material.

Researcher: Does code-switching enhance performance?

Respondent: No

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because it is done during speaking which is not examined inMalawi.

Researcher: What about guessing intelligently as a strategy?

Respondent: Our learners fail to guess intelligently but they always guess wrongly.It can enhance learning because learners can understand the meaning of a passage or a speech through intelligent guessing of difficult word. At this school this strategy does not help them.

Researcher: You said some shun communication; does this behaviour enhanceperformance?

Respondent: No, because it hinders participation and learners learn better bydoing.

Researcher: Does speaking slowly enhance performance?

Respondent: No.

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because speaking is not examinable in Malawi.

Researcher: Does planning enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes. Planning their work helps them to be organised and getfocused. As learners advance, they are faced with a lot of work and without planning they lose focus.

Researcher: Does paying attention have a relationship with performance?

Respondent: Yes, because it is the first step in learning. If the material is received wrongly, the learner will not perform successfully.

Researcher: What about working together in groups?

Respondent: Itenhances performance when learners assist each other with understanding. In our case, most of our learners do not take these groups seriously. They copy from the knowledgeable without understanding. They do not participate. It does not enhance performance because it becomes a period of personal interactions especially to the below average. This normally happens because of the shortage of books and the size of the groups.

Researcher: What about asking questions, do they enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes, learners ask teachers and friend for clarification on what they did not understand. It is also a sign that learners had been following the lesson.

Researcher: Do learner's attitudes, feelings and emotions and values have any relationship with their performance?

Respondent: No, because such things are not examinable.

Researcher: If these attitudes, feelings and emotions are negative can their performance not get affected?

Respondent: Learners who are focused are not really affected. They can slightly affect their learning but not performance because they are not examinable. It is mainly the below average who feel tense when learning because they lack knowledge of the language. It slightly affects learning but we always counsel our learners.

Researcher: You said learners evaluate their learning does this help in improving their performance?

Respondent: Not really. Few compare their grades with the previous and adjust their efforts to improve. Others set goals to achieve in the next term, for example, to improve their position.

Researcher: Does evaluation enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes, to the few who use it because it encourages hardworking.

Researcher: We have exhausted the strategies which learners use but are there other actions on how learners take responsibility of their learning?

Respondent: They take responsibility of their own learning by being resourceful to urge their parents to buy them some books, photocopy important notes or borrow from friends. They also have the responsibility to make sure other fellow learners do not disturb them. They report to the authorities about those who make noise and teachers punish them.

Researcher: We have come to the end of the interview. But before we close, do you have any other comments or questions to ask?

Respondent: I do not have much to say only that these strategies can be integrated easily in our teaching if the Ministry can provide us with enough materials, teachers and motivating infrustructure. We fail to encourage these strategies because of shortage of books, large classes and our learners are not motivated to learn in dilapidated classrooms because of this some learners already have the mentality that they are at an institution where they cannot succeed. This lack of motivation hinders them from using the required strategies seriously.

Researcher: Thank you very much for your wonderful contribution.

Respondent: You are welcome Madam.

APPENDIX 4: Focus group discussion questions

1. Why is English an important subject to learn?
2. English being so motivating to learn, what do you do in order to be successful in

   a- speaking b- listening c- reading d-writing
3. In each language skill above, why do you use those strategies?
4. Among all the reasons for learners performing poorly in English, how do you as learners contribute to this poor performance?
6. How does learning by doing help you to be successful?
7. What challenges do you face in order to master the four language skills and how do you solve them?
8. Do you set goals to achieve during learning? If yes, give examples.
9. What do you do to remember what you learn?
10. How does socialising with teachers and friends improve your learning?
11. Do having poor relationships with classmates and teachers have any effect?
12. How do you make sure there is good relationship with teachers and classmates?
13. Do you plan your language learning? If yes, how?
14. How do you evaluate your learning?
16. What contextual challenges limit you in the use of some language learning strategies?
17. How do the external examinations, curriculum load and class size and teachers affect your choice of language learning strategies?

APPENDIX 5: Observation schedule

Date: ..... School: .....

Class: ..... Time: .....

Language skill observed within the lesson and strategies used:

Reading:

Listening:

Speaking:

Writing:

Other observations:

1. Learners' ability to remember and relate previous information
2. Interactions:
   a. Learner to learner
   b. Learner to teacher
3. Learners' emotions,attitudesand feelings for learning
4. Teacher's influence of some strategies
5. Learner involvement and motivation
6. The use of compensation strategies to overcome language limitations when speaking or writing
7. Self management strategies observed
8. Cognitive strategies observed (suchas practising,analysing, and reasoning, receiving and sending messages, taking notes and summarising).
9. Other behaviours by teachers and learners observed influencing the use of some strategies.

APPENDIX 6: A sample of learners' progress report (surnames removed for anonymity)

FORM 3, TERM 1, 2010

NAME	MID TERM1 %	TERMINAL TEST PAPER 1 %	TERMINAL TEST PAPER 2 %
Alinafe	60	61	58
Anne	49	55	51
Anne	22	31	36
Agness	47	51	52
Alinafe	39	32	35
Brenda	56	60	58
Brian	65	70	66
Catherine	68	66	65
Comfort	56	51	49
Calorine	30	33	22
Chiyanjano	58	60	46
Chifundo	49	51	52
Chimango	61	52	50
Cosmas	23	36	39
Chikondi	50	49	55
Dyna	31	35	22
Dorothy	30	41	45
Esther	15	26	19
Esnart	48	-	-
Fatsileni	38	39	26
Fulkani	31	32	30
Florence	69	66	67
Gelard	52	50	44
Gosanaiti	41	48	40
Hetherwick	66	72	69
Innocent	52	60	51
Joseph	21	11	16
Justice	38	39	40
John	40	44	52
Khama	-	30	45
Lawrence	60	65	58
Morine	55	-	60
Misheki	23	16	25
Mwadida	50	49	-
Manuel	51	30	33

Modesta	16	-	-
Mayamiko	45	39	50
Madalitso	56	38	50
Maris	65	70	71
Martha	19	23	38
Monica	-	-	-
Mcnight	40	45	51
Mwanyana	73	75	69
Oscar	43	41	50
Overton	11	40	38
Onani	51	50	48
Pemphero	66	65	72
Rose	18	21	33
Peter	31	21	40
Rally	68	65	68
Ruth	19	21	30
Regina	67	64	67
Sarah	52	58	49
Sylvester	71	65	65
Steven	19	30	33
Susan	66	68	71
Shareen	44	51	55
Siyileni	60	62	58
Takondwa	10	38	39
Tabitha	39	30	39
Trifonia	18	21	30
Victor	40	49	52
Vanessa	39	30	33
Veronica	11	21	26
Waomba	50	48	41
Yamikani	69	72	78

APPENDIX 7: Letter of permission to conduct a research at the south east education

Chancellor College,

P.O Box 280,

Zomba.

29 March, 2009.

The Education Divisional Manager,

South East Education Division,

Private Bag 48, Zomba.

Dear Sir,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN YOUR DIVISION.

I write to apply for permission to carry out a research involving teachers and learnersin your secondary schools.

I am a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School. I am pursuing a master's degree in education majoring in curriculum and teaching studies with a bias in language education. My area of interest is: Exploring language learning strategies used by learners and how they reflect their performance.

I look forward to your favourable considerations.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Michael Bayani.

APPENDIX 8: A sample letter to headteachers asking for permission to conduct a research in their secondary schools

Chancellor College,

P.O.Box 280,

Zomba.

20 March 2010.

The head teacher,

Masongola Secondary School,

South East Education Division,

Private Bag 48, Zomba.

Dear Sir/Madam,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I write to apply for permission to carry out a research involving form three teachers and learners at your school.

I am a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School. I am pursuing a master's degree in education majoring in curriculum and teaching studies with a bias in language education. My area of interest is: Exploring language learning strategies used by learners and how they reflect their performance. Attached are my letters of introduction and permission to carry out the research from South East Education Division.

I look forward to your favourable considerations.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Michael Bayani.

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
Department of Educational Foundations

PRINCIPAL
Prof. Chris Kamlongera., B.A., DipTEO., M.A., Ph.D

P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI
Tel: (265) 01 522 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: (265) 01 522 046
Email: edf@chanco.unima.mw.

Our Ref.: Edf/6/19
Your Ref.:

5th July, 2008

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCING CATHERINE MICHAEL BAYANI

I have the pleasure to introduce to you Catherine Michael Bayani, our M.Ed [Curriculum Studies] student in the faculty of Education. To fulfill some of the requirements for the program, Catherine is investigating "students' language learning strategies". She is now required to collect data for her thesis. I, therefore, write to kindly ask for your support towards her study as she collects the data and related literature.

I thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and support.

Dr. Bob Wajizigha Chulu
Lecturer in Psychometrics & Head, Educational Foundations Department

REF. NO. SEED/ADM/VOL. II/279

29th March, 2010

FROM : THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER,

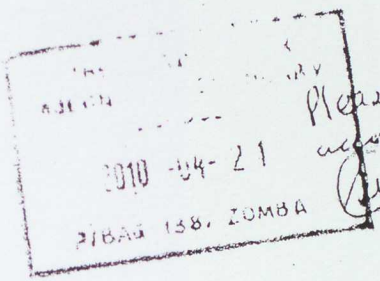
SOUTH EAST EDUCATION DIVISION,

PRIVATE BAG 48,

ZOMBA.

TO : THE HEADTEACHERS,

SEED SECONDARY SCHOOLS.



Please assist accordingly

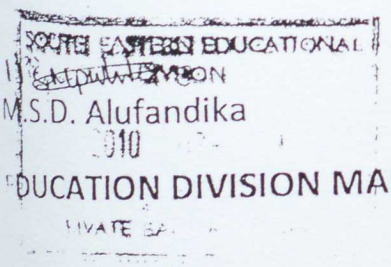
AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I write to kindly request your office to allow Ms Catherine Michael Bayani, to undertake research activities at your institutions.

Ms Catherine Bayani is a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School and currently she is pursuing her Master's degree in Education with the University of Malawi (Chancellor College).

I would be most grateful if Ms Bayani is given all the necessary support so that her research activities are carried out successfully.

I look forward to your usual support and hoping at the same time that you will accord this request, all the attention and urgency that it deserves.



M.S.D. Alufandika

EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER

INVESTIGATING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REFLECT THEIR PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF ZOMBA URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

MEd. (LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

CATHERINE SITILITHA MICHAEL BAYANI

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

MAY, 2014

MALAWI COLLECTION

INVESTIGATING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REFLECT THEIR PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF ZOMBA URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

M. ED (LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

By

CATHERINE SITILITHA MICHAEL BAYANI

B. Ed (Humanities) - University of Malawi

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIBRARY

Submitted to the Department Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Language Education)

University of Malawi

Chancellor College

May, 2014

DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

Catherine Sitilitha Michael Bayani

Full Legal Name

CSM Bayani

Signature

2 June 2014

Date

Chancellor College 31020001212977

MAL
275598
THE
568
BAY
2014

Certificate of Approval/Certification

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the learner's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature: _____ Date 30/05/14

Foster Kholowa, PhD (Senior Lecturer)

Main Supervisor

Signature: _____ Date 06/06/14

Mr Patrick Kapito, MA (Lecturer)

Member, Supervisory Committee



DEDICATION

To my late grandparents Mr and Mrs Mkwanda, my mother, E'Mary Nganisyo Kalipinde, and my brother, Geoffrey Michael Levi.

I thank you for bringing me up as a respectful and God-fearing woman and for labouring to get me educated under difficult social and economic circumstances. I also thank my sister, Mrs Martha Christopher Chingwalu, for your untimely support and love during the hard times I went through while I studied for this master's degree.

May God bless you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It could hardly be possible to come up with this thesis without the assistance and guidance from several sources. I do not take their efforts, sacrifice and patience for granted. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Foster Kholowa and Mr. Patrick Kapito for their tireless guidance in the work towards this dissertation even when things got out of hand. Your patience in reading and editing this long document and your encouragement inspired me to keep on forging ahead.

Second, I am also grateful to Dr Macloud Salanjira, Dr Symon Chiziwa, Dr Allan Lipenga and the entire Faculty of Education for the assistance and advice given during my writing of this dissertation.

Third, I would like to appreciate the contributions of Wisdom Murowa, Christopher Zambira, Dafren Muhamba and Frank Phiri Jr, for assisting me in computer hiccups and literacy and pestering them to go through my thesis for corrections.

Above all, I thank God for keeping me healthy during the period I was studying and guiding me on what to do when things got tough.

May God bless you all.

MALAWI COLLECTION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate language learning strategies used by secondary school learners and how they reflected their performance. The Learners' proficiency in the four English language skills in Malawian schools is still a challenge despite various efforts to ensure that learners acquire and develop proficiency in English. This has raised major concerns from various stakeholders considering the fact that English is the official language and a key to further education and employment. To achieve the above mentioned research goal, the study employed a qualitative research approach and used a phenomenological design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. The analysis of the data was done along with data collection by comparing data from different sources and tools and then developing themes and categories according to the theoretical framework and the main research questions.

The study concluded that although the learners' poor performance in English is attributed to a number of variables like large classes, unqualified teachers and home backgrounds, the way learners go about learning or the strategies they use also affect their performance. The learners used a variety of language learning strategies such as cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, social and affective in different degrees.

Through comparing the performance of above average and below average learners and the language learning strategies they used, the study found that cognitive strategies of practice, note-making and summary and reviewing; meta-cognitive strategies and the social strategy of asking questions enhanced performance. The above average learners who used them most highly also performed successfully. The cognitive strategies of rote memorization and highlighting; the social strategy of cooperating with others; compensation and affective strategies were found not enhancing performance. These were also the language learning strategies which the below average learners liked most leading to their failure.

This study makes two critical recommendations: Teachers must be conversant with different language learning strategies so that they can use them to assist learners attain skills and proficiency in English. Secondly, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should provide an enabling environment in all schools to facilitate the learning of English. Examples of the enabling environment could be provision of resources and minimizing large classes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

LIST OF OF TABLES ix

LIST OF APPENDICES x

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY 1

1.0 Chapter overview 1
1.1 Background to the study 1
1.2 Secondary school education in Malawi 3
1.3 The origin of the studies on language learning strategies 5
1.4 Statement of the problem 6
1.5 Purpose of Study 7
1.6 Key research question 7
1.6.1 Specific questions 7
1.7 Significance of the study 8
1.8 Limitations of the study 9
1.9 Definition of terms 9
1.10 Organization of the study 11
1.11 Chapter summary 11

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 12

2.0 Chapter Overview 12
2.1 The learning of English in Malawian schools 12
2.2 Language Learning Strategies definitions 16
2.3 Classification of language learning strategies (LLS) 18
2.3.1 Direct strategies 19
2.3.1.1 Cognitive strategies 19
2.3.1.2 Compensation strategies 20

2.3.2 Indirect strategies *21*
2.3.2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies *21*
2.3.2.2 Socio-affective strategies *22*
2.4 Importance of language learning strategies (LLS) *23*
2.5 Factors that influence strategy choice *24*
2.6 The relationship between language learning strategies use and learners' performance *27*
2.7 Learner training in language learning strategies *30*
2.8 Theoretical framework *31*
2.8.1 Constructivism *32*
2.8.2 The information processing model (IPM) *33*
2.8.3 Application of Vygotsky's theory on language learning strategies *35*
2.9 Chapter summary *36*

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 38

3.0 Chapter overview 38
3.1 Research design *38*
3.2 Selection of study site *39*
3.3 Sample population *39*
3.4 Data sources and sampling procedure *40*
3.5 Data collection *41*
3.5.1 In-depth interviews *41*
3.5.2 Focus group discussions *42*
3.5.3 Class observations *42*
3.6 Data management and analysis *43*
3.7 Piloting of the study *44*
3.8 Access negotiations *44*
3.9 Ethical issues *45*
3.10 Anonymity and confidentiality *45*
3.11 Enhancing credibility and authenticity of the study *45*
3.12 Chapter summary *46*

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 47

4.0 Chapter overview 47
4.1 Cognitive strategies used by secondary school English learners 47
4.1.1 Practising strategies *49*
4.1.1.1 Practice in listening and speaking *51*
4.1.1.2 Practice in English writing *55*
4.1.1.3 Practice in English reading and performance *58*

4.1.2 Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy.....60
4.1.2.1 Note taking and and summary.....61
4.1.2.2 Highlighting.....63
4.1.3Memorization.....65
4.1.3.1 Rote memorization.....67
4.1.3.2 Reviewing work done.....69
4.2 Compensation strategies used by secondary school learners.....71
4.2.1 Code-switching.....72
4.2.2 Delaying when speaking.....75
4.2.3 Avoiding communication partially or totally.....76
4.3 Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners.....78
4.3.1 Paying attention.....79
4.3.2 Organising and planning for one's learning.....82
4.3.2.1 Organising.....83
4.3.2.2 Finding out about their learning.....85
4.3.2.3 Setting goals and objectives.....88
4.3.3 Evaluating one's learning.....91
4.3.3.1 Self-monitoring.....92
4.3.3.2 Self-evaluation.....94
4.4 Affective strategies used by learners.....97
4.4.1 Lowering one's anxiety.....97
4.4.1.1 Knowing that they were not alone in their fears.....99
4.4.1.2 Using relaxation to lower their anxiety.....101
4.4.2 Taking one's emotional temperature.....103
4.4.2.1 Listening to one's body.....104
4.4.2.2 Discussing feelings with someone else.....106
4.5 Social strategies used by learners.....*108*
4.5.1 Asking questions.....109
4.5.2 Cooperating with others.....111
4.6 Chapter summary.....*114*

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....116

5.0 Chapter overview.....116
5.1 Key issues.....116
5.2 Recommendations.....119
5.3 Areas for further research.....120

REFERENCES.....121
APPENDICES.....130

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Cognitive strategies used by learners..... 48

Table 2: Practice as a cognitive strategy.....51

Table 3: Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy.....61

Table 4: Memorization as a sub- cognitive strategy.....66

Table 5: Compensation strategies used by learners.....72

Table 6: Metacognitive strategies used by learners 78

Table 7: Organising and planning as a meta-cognitive strategy.....82

Table 8: Evaluation as a meta-cognitive strategy.....91

Table 9: Affective strategies used by learners.....97

Table 10: Lowering anxiety as an affective strategy 98

Table 11: Taking emotional temperature as an affective strategy.....103

Table 12: Social strategies used by learners.....108

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for learners.....130

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for teachers.....132

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Dowe CDSS teacher 2, on 06/09/2010.....133

APPENDIX 4: Focus group discussion questions.....141

APPENDIX 5: Observation schedule.....142

APPENDIX 6: A sample of learners' progress report (surnames removed for anonymity).....143

APPENDIX 7: Letter of permission to conduct a research at the South East Education Division (SEED).....145

APPENDIX 8: A sample letter to head teachers asking for permission to conduct a research in their secondary schools.....146

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CDSS:	Community Day Secondary School
DEC:	Distance Education Centre
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
IPM:	Information Processing Model
LSS:	Language Learning strategies
MANEB:	Malawi National Examinations Board
MIE:	Malawi Institute of Education
MOEST:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MSCE:	Malawi School Certificate of Education
SEED:	South East Education Division
SQ3R:	Survey Question Read Review Recite
UDF:	United Democratic Front
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the basis for the entire thesis. It begins with the background of the study which is secondary school education in Malawi and the origin of the studies on language learning strategies. The second part gives the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, study limitations and the definition of terms.

1.1 Background to the study

Historically, the critical poor performance of both primary and secondary schools pupils in Malawi may have largely originated from the sudden declaration of the free primary education in 1994 which led to primary school enrolment almost doubling from 1.8 to 3.2 million between 1994 and 1997 (Presidential committee on quality education, 2000). This resulted in large classes, unqualified and insufficient teachers and inadequate resources (Chimombo, 2005; Commonwealth Education Fund Strategic Plan for Malawi, 2003-2005). In addition, these increased enrolments resulted in having large numbers of learners compared to the places which were available in secondary schools. To provide access to secondary school education, distance education centres (DECs) were renamed community day secondary schools (CDSSs) by the United Democratic Front (UDF) Government. This decision was made without much preparation in terms of ensuring that qualified teachers, infrastructure and learning materials were available and adequate

(Chimombo, 2005). The introduction of community day secondary schools therefore greatly contributed to the poor quality of education, low performance, increase in examination cheating and lack of motivation among these learners. The situation resulted in learners being unruly, disobedient, violent and unmotivated to learn and saw school rules and discipline measures as a violation of their freedom and human rights (Presidential committee on quality education, 2000).

Poor performance of learners remains a big challenge because although efforts are being made to slowly address some of these problems, many community day secondary schools (CDSSs) and few secondary schools still have large classes, unqualified teachers, poor infrastructure and insufficient teaching and learning materials. These challenges lead to teachers using non-participatory methods that lack room for practice and use of different learning strategies by learners.

In Malawi, English is taught in schools as a second language and it is also the official language of the country. It is the medium of instruction in education and a compulsory subject in all the schools (Matiki, 2001). English enjoys a high status in Malawi and generally, proficiency in English is one of the measurements of one's level of education (Matiki, 2001). However, a number of studies in Malawi have also shown that acquiring proficiency in English language in areas where it is a second language is a challenge. It has been revealed that many learners in Malawi face difficulties in learning English as a second language and many perform poorly (Matiki, 2001, & Presidential enquiry on quality education, 2000). Various studies have attributed the learners' poor performance to a number of factors such as teacher-pupil ratio, inadequate teacher training and lack of

appropriate teaching and learning materials (Department of Research, Evaluation, & Policy Studies Report, 2009; Chimombo, 2005). In Malawi, there is inadequate literature on how the learner's efforts and techniques to learning affect their performance and the language learning strategies they use to acquire competence in English. It is of great interest to find out from learners the strategies which they employ to learn and how such strategies affect their performance.

1.2 Secondary school education in Malawi

In Malawian government schools, a learner generally undergoes three levels: primary (eight years), secondary (four years) and tertiary levels of education. Secondary education is offered mainly through five types of schools which include grant aided, conventional, community day secondary schools, private schools and open distance learning schools. Grant aided secondary schools are high quality schools with adequate resources. Many are run by non-profitable organizations like church denominations but are government sponsored. Others are special government secondary schools found especially in every region of Malawi. It is where learners who perform very well at national level go to. Secondly, conventional secondary schools are government district secondary schools and learners selected to these schools are those who score high marks at district level. Community day secondary schools are schools where learners who did not score very highly during the national examinations are selected to. In these schools, those who just passed but were not selected because of low scores and those who completely failed easily find places. This leads to the enrolment being higher than the recommended of at least fifty students per class. In addition, these high enrolments lead

to classes having large numbers of below average learners. Private schools are those run by profit making owners and are expensive. Only those learners with well to do parents manage to go to these schools. Open distance schools which are also called night schools are those schools that are run in the secondary schools after normal classes. They are mainly for adults and those who dropped out or failed to get places at the secondary schools. The secondary level of education is divided into two sections which are junior (forms one to two) and senior (forms three to four). Transition from one section to another is determined by passing government national examinations with English proficiency serving as the final determiner for getting a pass score (Mmela, 2006).

Some of the objectives of secondary educationin Malawi are that learners develop effective communicative skills, apply problem solving techniques to new situations, develop good study skills necessary for intellectual growth and personal advancement and develop the spirit of inquiry and independent thinking (Malawi Institute of Education, 2002). Practically, these objectives are not achieved by many learners because of several factors including how they go about learning and the strategies they use. Vermont (1996) concurs that the learning activities that learners employ to a larger extent determine the quality of the learning outcome they achieve. By form one, learners are expected to be conversant in English. Secondary school instruction material and examinations are written in English (Friends of Malawi, 2004). However, Malawian school learner achievement in English is critically low (Mmela, 2006).

Many learners entering CDSS cannot understand English sufficiently to grasp the lessons. Thus it can be equally a challenge for learners to understand the questions in the examinations so as to answer them (Friends of Malawi, 2004).

In Malawi, the topic of language learning strategies is applied and appears in learners' textbooks especially after some units or chapters. However, to learners and some teachers, the word 'strategy' is not frequently mentioned. The common similar words used are learning tactics, techniques or learning how to learn. Consequently, learning strategy training may not be taken seriously as compared to other contexts where there is structured learner training within the curriculum. The investigation of learners' language learning strategies in Malawian Secondary schools might therefore reveal further causes of the poor performance by some learners.

1.3 The origin of the studies on language learning strategies

Literature on learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from concern with identifying the characteristics of effective learners. Research efforts concentrating on the "good language learner" had identified strategies reported by learners or observed in language learning situations that appear to contribute to learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). These studies noted that good language learners used more appropriate strategies to learn a language. They were flexible in their approach, had confidence in their learning ability, were motivated and expected to succeed in fulfilling their expectations. Successful learners tended to use learning strategies that were appropriate to the material, to the task, and to their own goals, needs, and stage of learning. (Celce- Murcia, 2001).

Researchers like Wenden and Rubin (1987) found that to improve competence, the below average learners could be helped to become effective by being trained on what expert or good language learners do. Wenden and Rubin (1987) concurs that it is assumed that once the strategies of the good language learner are identified, they can be made available and where useful, used by less successful learners to enable them to learn a foreign or second language more effectively.

However, later studies found that there was no single set of strategies always used by the good language learner. They found that less able learners used strategies randomly, in an unconnected and uncontrolled manner while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant systematic way at specific second language or foreign (L2) tasks (Abraham & Van, 1990; Chamot, 2003).

1.4 Statement of the problem

English occupies a central role in the socio-economic arena in Malawi. For instance, if one fails English he or she cannot obtain an academic certificate. This being the case, learners get more interested in passing examinations and ignore some important learning strategies necessary for language use in real contexts. A number of studies have revealed that learners in Malawi have difficulties in acquiring the necessary competencies in English language (Chimombo, Kunje, Chimuzu & Mchikoma 2005; Matiki, 2001). This situation affects both their ability to communicate effectively and their academic performance. A lot of factors have been said to contribute to English language failure, for example, lack of teaching and learning resources (Department of Research, Evaluation &

Policies report, 2009). However, it has been noted that in other schools where there are few resources, learners do perform well. In addition, in one school, other things being equal, some learners do better than others. Therefore, it is argued that it could not only be resources, differences in school factors, intelligence or teacher training that contribute to learning and competence as indicated by Aijaz (2001). Some individual and social attributes on the part of the learners are some of the contributing factors to the individual variations in the learning of English. Literature on language leaning calls such individual learning attributes to language learning, learning strategies. Wenden and Rubin (1987) concurs with the idea that some learners' success can be attributed to particular sets of cognitive, meta-cognitive and social behaviours which learners engage in. It is from this background this study aimed to investigate how the language learning strategies which English learners in secondary schools used affected their performance in English.

1.5 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the language learning strategies that learners used and how the use of such strategies reflected their performance in English.

1.6 Key research question

How do the language learning strategies which learners use affect their performance?

1.6.1 Specific questions

1. Which language learning strategies do learners use?
2. Howare these language learning strategies used?

3. What is the relationship between the language learning strategies learners use and their performance in English?

MALAWI COLLECTION

1.7 Significance of the study

There is very limited research on how learning strategies used by learners affect their performance in Malawian schools. Therefore, through learner training, this study will serve as one of the means of dealing with the serious problem of English language incompetence among learners. It will also serve to enrich our understanding of how learners learn English, how to respond to difficulties in learning and the insights we can gain from these. The study will also inform curriculum developers on the language strategies that Malawian learners use to learn English successfully so that the instructional materials they develop could contain activities and learning methodologies that could enhance effective learning. The study will also provide a missing link in research literature on the topic.

At a more practical level, the findings of this study could help university trainee teachers at training institutions to use those methodologies that supplement the language learning strategies used by learners in the classroom. Doing a research on learning strategies will help trainee teachers to fit well in the current language curriculum which encourages learner-centred activities and autonomous learning. This approach to teaching reinforces the use of many language learning strategies. The new teachers' knowledge from college will also help learners to know how to recognize the learning gaps in Malawian schools. It will also stimulate and encourage further research in the area.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in four schools in Zomba Urban. These were two boarding secondary schools and two community day secondary schools (CDSSs). The study proposed to interview four form three teachers per school but there were only two per school. This affected the study by reducing the number of participants. In addition, the study proposed to select above and below average learners with the assistance from teachers and progress reports starting from forms one to three. Some reports especially for the former years could not be found due to teachers' change of posting and learners who just joined the schools. Although these limitations might have had some implications for the outcomes of the study, the researcher made an effort to select learners who were above and below average using the available progress reports and the recommendations from teachers. These facts entail that the findings may not be generalized to the whole South East Education Division (SEED) or in the whole Malawi as a country. However, the findings of the study can be simply generalized within the context of the participating schools.

1.9 Definition of terms

The following terms are defined as follows in the context of this study:

Autonomy: It is the making of learning free from the bounds of any institution, and how the individual can reclaim control of and responsibility for his or her own education, while investigating the opportunities to learn from a variety of authentic sources. (British council, 1978, p.9).

Communicative competence: It is competence or ability to communicate. It concerns

both spoken and written language and all the four language skills.

Communicative competence has a comprehensive four part definition: grammatical competence or accuracy, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Oxford, 1990, p.7)

Communication strategies: They are techniques used by speakers when faced with some difficulty due to the fact that their communication ends outrun their communication means or when confronted with misunderstanding by a co-speaker (Faerch & Kasper, 1985).

Competence: Refers to what the learner knows (Chomsky, 1965; Llurda, 2011).

Foreign language: A language studied in an environment where it is not the primary vehicle for daily interaction and where input in that language is restricted (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Learning styles: Refers to the general approaches that learners use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject (Oxford, 1990).

Learning strategies: Steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1990).

Performance: What the learner actually does. It is a measure of results achieved and is concerned with learner ability (Chomsky, 1965).

Second language: A language studied in a setting where the language is the main vehicle of everyday communication (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

L2: Either a second or foreign language (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

1.10 Organization of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the problem. It presents the general background of the study stating the statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions and definition of operational terms. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and provides the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 comprises the research methodology. It explains the research design and how the data was analyzed with justification for methods used. It also explains the study site and sample of the study. Chapter 4 gives the results and discussion of the findings. It discusses what was observed and what it entails. Finally chapter 5 makes conclusions of the findings and recommendations of the study.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has given the background to the study which has also laid the basis of the whole thesis. It has further discussed secondary school education in Malawi, learner performance and the origin of studies in language learning strategies. In addition, a statement of the problem has been provided followed by the purpose of the study which includes the outline of the research questions that the study sought to explore. The chapter concludes by presenting the significance of the study to the field of teaching and learning, limitations and definition of terms.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of literature on language learning strategies which learners use and how they affect learners' performance. It begins by describing the learning of English in Malawian schools; defining and classifying language learning strategies; the motivation of using different language learning strategies (LLS); factors which influence learners in their choice of LLS and there after the relationship between language learning strategy use and performance and learner training are also discussed. Furthermore, the chapter discusses constructivism which is the theoretical framework that guides the study. As part of constructivism, the information processing model (IPM) is also discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses how the theoretical framework can be applied to LLS use.

2.1 The learning of English in Malawian schools

According to Matiki (2001), to many Malawians, economic success is predicted by one's ability to speak, read and write English. Many people throw in a lot of English words and phrases in their conversation when using vernacular languages. This means that the symbolic and attitudinal implication of English is greater than those of the indigenous languages (Matiki, 2001). This motivates learners in Malawi to make efforts to learn English but still performance in schools is not up to the standard (Department of

Research Evaluation & policy studies, 2009). The link between the declining standards in education in general and the poor performance in English in particular was made clear in recent consultative work for a Presidential Commission of Inquiry in the year 2000. The Commission noted that poor English skills both spoken and written were frequently cited by the stakeholders as indicators of the falling standards in education (Matiki, 2001). Furthermore, commenting on the 13% pass rate in the 1999/2000 Malawi School Certificate Examination (MSCE), one letter to the editor blamed the pervasive use of literal translations of Chichewa expressions into English by learners as indicators of the learners' lack of proficiency (Chagunda, 2000, p. 4). The above statements indicate that the issue of poor performance among learners especially in English originates from learners' poor background right from the primary school where it was not a priority for being promoted to the next class.

Kholowa (1999) did research concerning teaching and learning and examinations. He stipulated that research has shown that lack of competence in English among learners is a result of several factors but one of them is that learners are not given enough practice because teachers are more interested in teaching what is examinable than simply making pupils able to communicate. Satterly (1989) concurs that the pursuit of examination success has sometimes resulted in scanty attention to the need to show pupils how to learn (as cited in Kholowa, 1999, p. 29). For example, one of the participants in the Kholowa (1999) study said that if learners are left to work with little effort from the teacher, they will waste time on useless things outside the teaching syllabus which will lead to their failure during examinations. This statement is not in line with the Malawian

curricula which is learner-centred and expects the learners to take charge of their own learning. Examination oriented teaching and learning can hinder learners from life long learning. Learners need to take responsibility for their own learning while the teacher should be there as a facilitator and guide.

Dzama (2006) investigated the problem of poor performance in Science among learners in Malawian secondary schools. Apart from the lack of practice, he explains that learners are not involved in their own learning which contributes to poor performance among them. Furthermore, Dzama concluded that among the many causes of poor performance of learners in physical science, learners had limited knowledge of learning skills, lacked self control and had poor management of study time. Dzama added that learners mostly used strategies merely for reproducing class work with very shallow understanding resulting into poor performance. According to the researcher, Dzama's study was concerned with Physical Science only but most of his findings could also apply to why the learners' performances are low in the other subjects including English. For example, on the use of strategies merely for reproducing class work without seriously involving their mental processes to understand the content. Such learners become passive and believe that the teacher is the only knowledgeable. Learners' involvement helps them to understand and remember what they learn. Only the idea one has created by oneself leaves a mark on one's understanding that can be used on a later occasion. Involvement in one's learning is important and can make the learner easily apply what is learnt in real life situations outside the classroom.

MALAWI COLLECTION

Kishindo et al. (2005) conducted a research study on the learner achievement in Mathematics, English, science and Chichewa in Malawian primary schools in standards three, five, and seven. The results showed that in all the four subjects including English, less than 10% of the learners were adequately prepared for the upper class into which they were promoted to. Secondly, learner achievement in English was rated third highest with science having the least performance. Furthermore, research findings by UNESCO also concur that only a small proportion of children in Malawi are reaching the minimum required competencies and our education system is not performing to the standards we expect them (UNESCO, 2000, p.28). Related to the Kishindo et al. (2005) study, Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2008) study also showed that standard three learners performed relatively better in numeracy and mathematics but their performance in English was the lowest with a percentage mean of 5.79. MoEST (2008) also reported that one of the challenges to be addressed if the system of education is to improve in Malawi is poor learning achievement citing only 50% of learners passing end of cycle examinations.This poor background could cause learning problems for the whole school system because if learners' performance is poor in English but they still proceed to the next class where the language is more advanced, the situation worsens. This can lead to frustrations and lack of motivation.

Lipenga (2011) did research concerning the English teaching strategies and methods used in primary schools for the development of language proficiency. Among other things he found that learners were put in large groups of 10-12 learners per group. As a result there was a lot of noise which came about due to the large groups and failure by teachers to

control the learners. Lipenga's study also established that learners used Chichewa for discussions which defeated all the efforts to develop English language proficiency amongst learners. In his study, teachers stated that due to the large classes, they did not mind whether learners had understood and acquired the English language or not, provided they taught. This situation can also apply to some secondary schools in Malawi. The above sentiments indicate that some teachers contribute to their learners' low performance by lacking commitment to help learners use different learning strategies. They use group work because of lack of resources, to ease their work and not to allow learners to learn from each other through interaction. Groups which are not well organized and monitored can reduce learners' motivation to learn leading to disturbances and only few learners participating. The rest may use the group work time for chatting and writing exercises for other subjects.

2.2 Language learning strategies definitions

According to Oxford (1990), the word "strategy" comes from a Greek term 'strategia' which means steps or actions generals take for the purpose of winning a war. It is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose; the process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skilful way. Lee (2010) compares learning strategies to footballers who use tactics in order to win a game when they are in a stadium. With reference to learners, the definitions are based on the assumption that the learners plan and are consciously engaged in activities to achieve certain goals and they exercise a choice of procedures. They always think of the solutions or steps to take in order to solve the language problems they encounter during learning. Several authors have defined

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE - LIBRARY

language learning strategies (LLS). According to Oxford (1990), LLS are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques which learners use – often consciously- to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the second or foreign language (L2). They are actions taken by learners to control and improve their own learning. Strategies are tools for the self–directed involvement necessary for developing communication ability (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Faerch, Claus, and Casper (1983) define a learning strategy as an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Thus from the definitions, learning responsibility is more in the hands of the learner than the teacher. Even with the best teachers and methods, learners are the only ones who can actually do the learning. Furthermore, strategies are behaviours that are amenable to change. They can be modified or rejected and unfamiliar ones can be learnt (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.8). They are part of software and are flexible. That is, they are not always found in predictable sequences or in precise patterns. There is a great deal of individuality in the way learners choose, combine and sequence strategies (Oxford, 1990, p.13). From these characteristics, language learning strategies can change according to the task and choices of the learner on what works best. These variations contribute to the differences in their performance.

Learning strategies are related to learning styles because they both determine how well a learner will learn a language (Oxford, 1990). Celce-Murcia (2001) defines learning styles as an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills. They are different from learning strategies in that strategies vary widely within an individual, while styles are more constant and

predictable. To make it more clear, a learning style is the biological and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This shows that individual learning styles play a role in learners' choices of different learning strategies. Although these styles can be natural or developmental, teachers still have a role to encourage learners to switch to other styles which aid learning like combination of being visual, auditory and tactile.

2.3 Classification of language learning strategies (LLS)

Different authors have compiled learning strategies which vary in length, scope and terminology. Some are shorter and others longer but comprise more or less similar categories. According to Oxford (1990) and Cajkler and Addelman (2000), language learning strategies are grouped into two main groups. These are direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are grouped into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are grouped into meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Wenden and Rubin (1987) classified strategies into learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. There after, they classified LLS into three; cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Stern (1992) classified them into five: management and planning strategies, cognitive, communicative-experiential strategies, interpersonal strategies and affective strategies. In addition, Cohen's (1996) typology comprises retrieval, rehearsal, coping or cover and communication strategies. Below is a discussion of these different language learning strategies.

2.3.1 Direct strategies

Oxford (1990) defines direct strategies as those that involve the target language. She further states that all direct strategies require mental processes (p.37). Cajkler and Addelman (2000) call them language specific strategies. Examples of direct strategies are cognitive, memory and compensation strategies. These have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.3.1.1 Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations used in learning or problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation, synthesis of learning materials (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.23). They enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means (Oxford, 1990). Examples of cognitive strategies are rehearsal, organisation or grouping, inference and summarising (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Among the different authors, Oxford (1990) is the only one who included memory strategies in her typology. Cohen (1996) calls them retrieval strategies.

Memory strategies are sometimes called mnemonics (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). They are strategies for the storage and retrieval of information. Thompson, a co-author in Wenden and Rubin (1987) states that it is difficult to think of any educational goal for which the ability to retain information is unimportant. The other authors, for example, Stern (1992); Wenden and Rubin (1987) included memory as a cognitive strategy. Although Oxford's classification is one of the latest and more detailed, the researcher concurs with the other authors like O'Malley and Chamot (1990) that memory strategies

could be included as part of cognitive strategies because mental processes are involved for one to remember and retrieve what she or he has learnt.

2.3.1.2 Compensation strategies

Compensation strategies are those that enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations of knowledge (Oxford, 1990). Stern (1992) calls them communicative – experiential strategies while Cohen (1996) calls them coping or cover strategies. Examples of these strategies are guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (Oxford, 1990). Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing includes code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication.

Code-switching means a phenomenon of changing from one language to another in the same discourse (Kalong, 2008). Code-switching seems to serve a significant communicative and cognitive function in a conversation. It plays the roles of facilitating, supporting and encouraging thinking and communication. Kalong (2008) states that code switching can both facilitate and hinder the learning of English. It can also be considered as a helpful method in the classroom as new content and new knowledge are able to be transmitted to the learners effectively. The statements do not specify the degree of code-switching and the stage of learners at which code-switching can be suitable. If it is too much it can lead to learners using less English words compared to Chichewa and missing the meaning of practising the target language. The use of code-switching in learning the target language may also lead to loss of fluency in the target language. The more frequent

learners use code-switching, the bigger the chance of them to face fluency loss in mastering the language. Furthermore, the over use of the native language may deprive learners of the needed input. Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Wenden and Rubin (1987) do not classify compensation strategies as language learning strategies. Instead they call them communication strategies. These authors do not recognise communication strategies as learning strategies because they believe communication is the output modality while learning is the input modality. In the researcher's opinion, what is important is that communication or compensation strategies, whether included as learning strategies or separated, aid in language learning as well. Each instance of second language use is an opportunity for more learning of the language.

2.3.2 Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies are those that contribute to learning indirectly. They are for the general management of learning. They support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language (Oxford, 1990). Cajkler and Addelman (2000) call them general private strategies. Examples of these strategies are meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). These have been discussed further below.

2.3.2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies

The word meta-cognitive means beyond, beside or within the cognitive (Oxford, 1990, p.136). Meta-cognitive strategies are those that involve thinking about the learning process, planning for the learning, monitoring of learning while it is taking place and self evaluation of learning after the learning activity (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). They are

MALAWI COLLECTION

actions used by learners for the general management of their learning (Oxford, 1990). Meta-cognitive strategies help to improve the organisation of learning time, self monitoring and self evaluation. It refers to higher order thinking that involves active control over the cognitive processes which influence learning (Livingston, 1997). Stern (1992) calls these strategies as management and planning strategies. This means they are associated with the learners' intention to direct their own learning. Examples of meta-cognitive strategies are paying attention, planning for the language task and self evaluation (Oxford, 1990). Thus language learners are often over whelmed by too much work like literature books to read, unfamiliar vocabulary and confusing rules. This can make them lose focus. Meta-cognitive strategies are important because their use help learners to regain their focus get organised and schedule their time.

2.3.2.2 Socio-affective strategies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) combine the social and affective strategies while other authors like Oxford (1990) separate them. The researcher suggests that it is better to separate social and affective strategies because although they both involve groups they are different. Social strategies are activities learners engage in which afford them opportunities to be exposed to and practise their knowledge (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Stern (1992) calls them interpersonal strategies. These strategies help the learner to ask for help from competent people and develop good classroom climate with good relationships (Oxford, 1990). Social strategies can be grouped into asking questions,

co-operating with others and empathising with others (Oxford, 1990). Thus, language is a form of behaviour. It is communication and communication occurs between and among people. Learners learn through interaction.

Furthermore, the term affective refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations and values. The affective part of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language success or failure. For example, if the learner does not like the culture of the target language, he or she cannot be motivated to learn. Some of the affective strategies are lowering ones anxiety and encouraging oneself (Oxford, 1990).

A large overlap exists among the strategy groups. For example, guessing is a communication strategy used to make up for the missing knowledge but also requires reasoning which is a cognitive strategy. Oxford (1990) also adds that there is no complete agreement on how many language learning strategies (LLS) exist and how they should be demarcated and categorised. This indicates that research on the taxonomy of language learning strategies is still underway. One strategy can belong to more than one group. For example, intelligent guessing can be a compensation strategy but at the same time a cognitive strategy. This is because for one to guess, mental processes are also applied.

2.4 Importance of language learning strategies (LLS)

Language learning strategies contribute to the main goal of communicative competence by helping learners' participation in authentic communication (Oxford, 1990). They give teachers valuable clues about how their learners plan and these help them to select

appropriate skills. Learning strategies simplify and make learning faster, more enjoyable and more self directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Learning becomes efficient and effective and learners become independent (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Prevatt (2006) states that determination of learning and study strategies can help to screen and identify learners at risk of poor performance; be used diagnostically to evaluate areas of difficulty and be useful in advising learners seeking a better awareness of their academic strengths and weaknesses (as cited in Ngwira, 2010, p. 2). The language learner builds up learner independence and autonomy whereby the learners can take control of their own learning (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Thus, the study of good language learner would also help good learners with a talent for languages to make the best possible use of their abilities. This shows that the use of appropriate strategies often results in improved achievement overall or in specific areas. Training learners to use learning strategies can help them become better language learners. From the above strengths, LLS are very important tools that promote active learning with the teacher as a facilitator.

2.5 Factors that influence strategy choice

Learners vary in the frequency and types of strategies they use. Many factors affect the choice of strategies. For example, the degree of awareness, task requirements, teacher expectation, sex, culture, general learning style, personality traits and motivation level (Oxford, 1990). The following is a discussion of some factors that influence learner choice of different LLS.

Firstly, the degree of awareness affects learners' choice of LLS. Learners who are more aware and more advanced seem to use better strategies than those who are not aware and less advanced (Oxford, 1990, p. 13). Higher level learners are more able to use strategies than the lower level learners. Research has found that less able learners use strategies in a random, unconnected and uncontrolled manner where as more effective learners show careful orchestration of strategies used in a systematic way.

Secondly, task type and requirement guides the strategy choice. Studies by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) found that learners reported using the highest frequency for vocabulary learning tasks and oral drills. The lowest frequencies were for listening comprehension, inference and making an oral presentation. The statements indicate that learners choose learning strategies depending on the task at hand. Learners would not use the same strategies for writing a composition as for bargaining in a shop.

Thirdly, teacher expectation also affects the learner's choice of LLS. The classroom instructional and testing methods strongly shape learner strategies. For instance, classroom emphasis on discrete-point grammar learning will result in the development of LLS like analysis and reasoning rather than more global strategies for communication (Oxford, 1990). The findings reveal that the teacher has a role to play in providing an environment which facilitates the use of those strategies which work best for learners. One way of doing this is by promoting the learner-centred methods of teaching.

Fourthly, the general learning style such as field dependence-independence, analytic-global orientation or the judging-perceiving mode has a strong effect on strategies learners use (Oxford, 1990). For example, a learner who is a visual learner may naturally use imagery as a preferred strategy.

Recent studies indicate that females may use a much wider or at least a wider range of strategies than males for language learning (Oxford, 1990). However, Radwan (2011) in his study of investigating language learning strategies (LLS) used by 128 learners majoring in English at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman found that there was no significant difference between male and female learners in the overall use of strategies. In the researcher's opinion, Oxford's study does not tell us at what stage females use better strategies than males and why. The same studies done indicating females using a wider range of strategies cannot be easily transferable to every context because of differences in cultural factors. In some cultures male learners dominate. Males and females can vary in the use of strategies according to stages and motivation.

In addition, nationality and ethnicity influences strategy use. According to Oxford (1990), Hispanics seem to use social strategies more than do other ethnic groups. Harvey (1985) also found that in China, culture contributed to learners' choice of LLS leading to using a lot of rote memorization strategies. Harvey (1985) also noted that quite a big number of English as Foreign Language (EFL) Chinese learners are not so called good language learners because they generally would not like to make inferences about the meanings of words or sentences, to pay too little attention to communication skills, being

corrected and concentrate largely on grammatical structures. Their choice of strategies originated from their culture in which diligence in learning had been greatly stressed and highly praised since the emergence of the ancient civil examination "Ke Ju." In order to obtain higher marks and step higher on the power ladder, candidates had to learn a lot of ancient classics by rote memorization.

Finally, Oxford (1990) states that more highly motivated learners use significantly greater range of strategies than do less motivated learners. Learners who have set goals to achieve will apply different strategies to succeed. For instance, individuals who want to learn a new language mainly for interpersonal communication will use different strategies than learners who want to learn a new language merely to fulfill a graduation requirement (Oxford, 1990). From the above discussion, motivation and goals set direct the quality of strategies which learners use. For example, a learner who has the goal of going to the university will differ in some choices of strategies with one who just aims at getting a certificate.

2.6 The relationship between language learning strategies use and learners' performance

Chomsky (1965) defined competence as what the learner knows and performance as what the learner actually does. In other words, performance is a measure of the results achieved and is concerned with learner ability. Celce-Murcia (2001) asserts that the use of LLS is demons ratably related to learner achievement proficiency and that in light of this remarkable association between LLS use and positive learning outcomes, it is not

surprising that learners who frequently employ learning strategies enjoy a higher level of efficacy which is perception of being effective learners.

In Botswana, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) explored the relationship between the use of preferred language learning strategies and proficiency. The findings reveal that Botswana learners do use language learning strategies and that there is a dynamic relationship between the use of LLS and proficiency. Related to this study, Ya-Ling Wu (2008) did a study in Taiwan. He found that higher proficiency English as a foreign language (EFL) learners use language learning strategies more than lower proficiency learners, especially cognitive, meta-cognitive and social strategies. On the other hand, there was no difference in the use of memory strategies between the higher and lower proficiency EFL learners. Regarding the relationship between LLS and English proficiency, Ya-Ling Wu found that cognitive strategies had the strongest influence. His findings also revealed that compensation strategies were most often used by EFL learners. From the discussions, all types of learners used memory strategies similarly because they were influenced by the looming examinations. The difference could be that the high proficiency learners used meaningful memory strategies and mixed them with other cognitive strategies in order to be successful.

Jurkovic (2008) conducted research on the correlation between competence and LLS use at University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. The study also found that the first strongest correlation was found between the frequency use of cognitive strategies and language competence. Ehirman and Oxford (1990) also conducted a study among 520 highly

educated native speakers of English, working for the United States administration bodies, on whether language progress correlates with the frequency use of cognitive strategies. Similar to Jarkovic, they also found that language progress most strongly correlates with the frequency use of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, Jurkovic (2008) concluded that the social negative correlation was because learners that had reached lower levels of language competence before enrolment in a tertiary education institution feel the need to cooperate with their peers and other users of English while the same need is absent amongst learners at a higher level of competence. Learners with higher levels of language competence also seem to be more aware of their needs and evaluate the progress they are making. The study does not tell us whether there was correlation between the use of meta-cognitive strategies and competence. In addition, there was no reason given why mainly the learners of higher levels used this strategy.

In another related study, Shmais (2003) did a study that involved 120 learners majoring in English in Palestine. He concluded that learners at higher levels of language competence are more aware of their learning needs and more frequently look for opportunities for learning themselves. On the other hand, the frequency of use of affective and social strategies seemed to be negatively correlated with language competence. Learners at higher levels of language competence used cognitive strategies more often and social and affective strategies less often than their less successful learners.

The different findings reveal that cognitive strategies enhance performance and that effective learners use those most. The negative correlation between affective and social

strategies and competence found by different authors indicate that learners at lower levels of language competence tend to be tenser and anxious when learning second or foreign languages which may hinder their learning process and thus lead to poor results. However, Mullins (1992) found that high level learners used compensation strategies most and it led to their high performance. The reason for variation in the findings could also be a result of differences in contexts. Jurkovic (2008) further states that it is not merely quantity but the quality of LLS. The results showed that there was a strong relationship between language learning strategy use and competence which possibly indicates that language progress can be enhanced through strategy instruction. In addition, Fewell (2010) did research in Japan on the relationship between LLS use and proficiency. In this study an English major group indicated the opposite. English proficiency level increased when LLS utilization decreased. In the researcher's opinion, this could be because of the Japanese learning system of emphasizing rote learning. Researchers have noted similarities in Asian learners adopting rote learning as a primary strategy and it could also be due to institutional constraints in emphasizing standardized testing.

2.7 Learner training in language learning strategies

Several authors like Wenden and Rubin (1987) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) found that in order to improve competence in learners, LLS can be taught. Researchers and teachers have provided instruction to how to use more relevant and more powerful learning strategies. Thus, being able to use the best strategies out of a carefully cultivated range does not always come by it self but learners need guidance on how to learn.

Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) state that if learning how to learn is introduced into the curriculum late, it can prove too late to be effective because learners would have already worked out for themselves the habits which they prefer. He adds that if learning to learn is to be achieved, the basic patterns should be laid down in early adolescence or perhaps earlier (1986, p. 94). The statements clearly explain why some of our learners fail to benefit from learning how to learn instructions. Learners can resist change of their old learning habits and beliefs. For example, the belief that knowledge can be simply given by the teacher while they are just passive. It is the role of the teachers to make it clear that the goal of strategy instruction is to supplant strategies that do not work and encourage those that work. For example, discouraging rote memorization and encouraging practice and reviewing their work.

According to McKeachy (1988), there is needed to train our learners how to study which is a meta-cognitive strategy. There are individual differences in the way learners study and it has been demonstrated that these differences in the study strategies are related to differences in achievement. " 'A' learners study in ways different from those of 'C' and 'D' learners," (McKeachy, 1988, p.3). The study does not clearly describe in detail how the 'A' learners study so that the 'C' and 'D' learners can be taught. Obviously they can be taught to be organized and avoid procrastination in fulfilling schedules.

2.8 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the social constructivist theory by Levy Vygotsky [1896-1934] (1962). Within constructivism, the study also followed the information processing model

2.8.1 Constructivism

The term constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves. Each learner individually and socially constructs meaning, as he or she learns (Vygotsky, 1962). Constructing meaning is learning. Learning therefore implies the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. Vygotsky's theory of learning states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, logical memory and to the formation of concepts. The theory rests on two key assumptions that learning occurs in a social grouping and that those who are more knowledgeable tended to help the less knowledgeable ones to become knowledgeable through the scaffolding process. Miller (2003) adds that learners working in teams under the guidance of the teacher will, according to this view, more easily discover and comprehend difficult concepts if they can talk to each other about the problems. Vygotsky insisted on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge.

The most significant bases of social constructivist theory were laid by Vygotsky (1962) in his theory of the "Zone of proximal development" (ZPD). "Proximal" simply means "next". He observed that when children were tested on tasks on their own, they rarely did as well as when they were working in collaboration with an adult (Vygotsky, 1962). When learning English, there is need for teachers to set up cooperative learning

arrangements among groups of learners with different levels of ability in order to make the low performers discover from the high performers.

However, some cognitive scientists and other educators like Mayer (2004), question the effectiveness of constructivism towards instructional design. He argues that little empirical evidence exists to support "learning by doing" given novice learners. Mayer further argues that novices do not possess the underlying mental model or schemas necessary for pure discovery learning where as learners discover for themselves. Hence, guided discovery is recommended (Mayer, 2004). In addition, he also argues on constructivism's insisting of change of control from the teacher to the learner.

Educational psychologists with their foundations in behavioral psychology have sought to design programs in such a way that learners would be enticed to achieve specified objectives. Constructivists have said that this violates both what we know now and the nature of knowledge. They have claimed that objectives should be negotiated with learners based on their felt needs, which programmed activities should emerge from within the contexts of their livedworlds.

2.8.2 The Information Processing Model (IPM)

Within constructivism, the information processing model developed by Miller (1956) explains better about language learning and strategies. According to this model, learning strategies means to know what to learn, how to learn and to form and direct one's own learning (Miller, 2003). Learning strategies are known as individual methods that aim to

increase the information process quality of learners and include mental operations that can be used by learners and be taught by teachers. According to Miller (1956), the main factors of this theory are about perception, thinking, learning, memory, attention, creativity and reasoning. Ozel (2009) stipulates that in the Information Processing model, the focal point is the individual and his living space. The individual's bio genetic potential, his mind of habit prone to develop his potential and his social interaction field are identifiers of both his learning and his learning forms.

The Information processing model that is meaningful according to an individual in this context looks for answers to the following four questions: *How is new information taken from outside? How is the new information processed? How is information stored in the long term memory? How is the stored information recalled?*

This process is a mental process that includes information storage and cognitive activities that provides the transferring of the information between memories. These are the sensory register composed of sensory organs like eyes and ears through which we receive information about our surroundings; the working memory or short term memory where information is temporarily held so that it may be discarded or transferred to the long term memory. The model likens the thinking process to how a computer works. The human mind takes in information, organises and stores it to be retrieved at a later time. These ways are determined with the formation coding and organisations in a certain directory in short term memory in order to store information in long term memory. According to Ozel (2009), at this point individual learning strategies that will create meaningful learning forms appear. These processes that simplify the learning of the learners and directly

shape their learning activities are key mental forms that are routines of learners. In humans, the results of IPM are exhibited through behaviour or actions- facial expression, a reply to a question or movement.

2.8.3 Application of Vygotsky's Theory on language learning strategies

Firstly, the social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1962) emphasizes social interaction as important in the development of competence during learning. This being the case teachers must encourage social interaction to maximise competence in all the four language skills. Language learning strategies fulfil this interaction under social and affective strategies. The learner uses social strategies when he interacts with the knowledgeable like the teacher and peers in pairs or groups. The learner interacts to ask questions; cooperates with others and develops empathy with others. In order to manage social activities and become motivated, learners also need affective strategies like lowering their anxiety, encouraging themselves and taking their emotional temperature.

Secondly, the theory stresses on assisting learners to learn in order to improve their competence. In Vygotsky's theory, this is called 'the Zone of Proximal Development.' Through working in teams under the guidance of the teachers, learners will more easily discover and comprehend difficult concepts if they can talk with each other about the problems. In relation to this notion, literature on second language learning states that language learning strategies can be taught in order to help learners develop competence (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Learners are supposed to be guided and assisted to refine the strategies that they already know and be trained in those they are not aware of. They are

also supposed to be monitored to check if the training has improved how they learn and their competence. Thirdly, the theory views learning as an active process and insist on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge individually and socially during learning. This indicates that the road to knowledge is always under construction. For the learner to be competent in language learning, there is need for the individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just to memorise the right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning. The theory views learning as an active process with active practice and review that leads to the greatest retention of knowledge. One of the general characteristics of constructivism is encouragement and acceptance of the learner's autonomy and initiative (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p.103). This view is related to the study of LLS in that it also aims at achieving an autonomous learner (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.8). Autonomy can be enhanced through being active to use memory strategies to remember, cognitive strategies to think, practice and construct knowledge, compensation strategies to guess intelligently and overcome limitations when practising the target language. Learners also become active and autonomous when they apply meta-cognitive strategies to plan, monitor and problem-solve and evaluate their knowledge construction while learning.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter has reviewed related literature from different authors. It has discussed the English learning situation in Malawi, the definition and classification of language learning strategies and the motivation for using them, factors that affect LLS choice and how the learners' use of different LLS affects their performance. Finally, it has discussed

the constructivist theory mainly from the Information Processing Model perspective. The next chapter discusses the research methodology used to come up with the findings.

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the research design and the data collection methods that were used to conduct the study. It also discusses how respondents were selected and ways in which the data collected was analysed. Ethical considerations taken are also presented.

3.1 Research design

The study was mainly guided by a qualitative approach. However, quantitative approach was slightly used to interpret some data in figures where necessary. Qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences and attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants (Dawson, 2002). Frankiel and Wallen (2008) state that qualitative data is detailed with thick description, inquiry in-depth, direct quotations capturing people's perspectives and experiences. The study mostly employed a qualitative research approach because it was exploratory in nature and that issues under investigation demanded prolonged engagement with respondents so as to understand their experiences. It aimed at learning some facets of the world in detail.

Within the qualitative approach, the study used a phenomenological design. Patton (2002) stipulates that a phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of

MALAWI COLLECTION

what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. In phenomenology, the researcher hopes to gain some insight into the world of his or her participants and to describe their perceptions and reactions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Phenomenologist believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality and reality is consequently socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1988). This approach was chosen because of the nature of the study. The researcher wanted to carefully and thoroughly capture and describe how the strategies learners used affected their performance in English. The study endeavored to provide a thick description of the situation at the identified secondary schools so that the findings might have the potential of applicability in other settings.

3.2 Selection of study site

The study was conducted in the city of Zomba which falls under the South East Education Division (SEED) in the Ministry of Education of Malawi. Zomba City was selected because it was closer to the researcher's home in which case the schools were easily accessible. This made the research to be conducted without much economic stress. Creswell (2003) concurs by stating that studying one's backyard provides easy access to informants and information at a minimal cost.

3.3 Sample population

Within Zomba Urban, four secondary schools were purposefully selected in terms of resource availability, day and boarding, sex composition, among others. This concurs

with Merriam (1998) who stipulates that purposeful sampling entails the selection of a sample from which one can learn the most to gain understanding and insight. Two of the secondary schools were boarding schools while the other two were community day secondary schools (CDSSs). These two different types of secondary schools were chosen in order to have the correct information about the language learning strategies used by Zomba urban learners.

3.4 Data sources and sampling procedure

Data was collected from teachers of English teaching in form three and form three learners. In total, the study involved eight teachers and ninty six learners. This means the overall sample was one hundred and four. The sample was purposefully selected. Form three teachers were selected because they would have more to say about the form three learners than teachers from other classes. Teachers were required to assist in the selection of above and below average learners. The study selected below and above average learners basing on their teachers' recommendations and with reference to their progress reports in English starting from form one. (Refer sample in Appendix 6). Those who scored 65% and above in every test were rated as above average learners and those who scored below 40% were rated as below average learners. These teachers were also included in order for the researcher to have different sources of information on the strategies their learners used and how they affected their performance. In addition, one form three class per school was selected. Two schools had three streams for form three while the remaining two schools had one stream. Random sampling selection was employed in the schools with more than one stream. The form three classes were selected

because they were more experienced to secondary school survival than the form ones and that they were not examination classes. At the time of the study, other classes were busy preparing for examinations and involving them in such a study could have been difficult as they would be less interested.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection took a period of two and half months. It was conducted in the second and third term of the 2010 school calendar. It started on 7 July 2010 up to 3 October 2010 with a break of two weeks during the end of second term holidays. The methods of data collection were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and class observations.

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

The interview method was chosen because, "an interview is a useful way to get a large amount of data quickly," (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.108). Within the one form three class selected at each school, eight learners were interviewed individually. Four best learners and four below average learners were involved. These learners were selected purposefully by the researcher based on their progress reports (see sample on appendix 6) and with help from their teachers. This gave a total sample of thirty two learners and eight teachers to be interviewed individually making a total of forty interviewees. The results were recorded in a diary. However, Bell (1993) states that interviews are highly subjective techniques and therefore there is the danger of bias. This is why a variety of methods were used for triangulation purposes.

3.5.2 Focus group discussions

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 324) define a focus group interview as a group interview where a moderator seeks to focus the group discussion on specific themes of research interest. These may be called discussion groups or group interviews. Focus groups discussions were used inorder to make participants offer additional comments beyond what they originally had to say once they hear the other responses (Frankiel & Wallen, 2009). However, in focus groups, some people may be uncomfortable in a group setting and nervous about speaking in front of others. Not everyone can contribute and other people may contaminate an individual's views (Dawson, 2002, p. 29). To overcome this in this study, learners were advised to respect each other's views.

Within form three classes selected at each school, the study used two focus groups per school making a total of eight focus groups of eight learners each. In total, the focus groups involved a sample of 64 learners. Each focus group consisted of four above average learners, and four below average learners. The results were audio tape recorded and later transcribed. In both interviews and focus group discussions, the issue of gender was considered. The sample comprised both male and female learners in order to compare how they used different language learning strategies.

3.5.3 Class observations

According to Wisker (2008), observation is a way of gathering data by watching behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting. Observation enables the researcher to capture what people actually do rather than what they say they

do (p.203). The total sample of one hundred and four was also observed. In order to follow research ethics, the observation was overt. That is to say everyone knew that he or she was being observed. The justification for choosing this method is that observational data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. However, people behave differently when they know that they are being observed ending up making the results biased. In this study, this was overcome by piloting the instruments and the repetition of the process. Each class was observed for four times. Every observation took one class period of about forty minutes. This gave a total of four class periods to be observed per school and a total of sixteen observations throughout the study.

3.6 Data management and analysis

Data analysis began as soon data collection started. It was an ongoing process which was carried out along side data collection (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As suggested by Arher et al. (2007), data collection and data analysis are parallel activities in qualitative research. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious and overwhelming in terms of the large volume of the material that needs to be processed. The analysis began by cleaning the data to make it clear and well understood. It was read over and over and there were comparisons between data from learners and teachers' interviews and observations. All these steps helped to identify themes and categories. The data was then finally analyzed according to the theoretical framework and the main research questions.

3.7 Piloting of the study

Before the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted at Masongola secondary school within Zomba urban. This was to find out if the planned time line was feasible and whether or not the interview questions and the observation schedule were appropriate and effective (Dawson, 2002). It was revealed from the pilot study that some questions were ambiguous and participants were not comfortable with some English words. For example, learners and some teachers could not understand the word "strategies." The questions were then adjusted and rephrased in preparation for the actual research in order for participants to come out with the required results.

3.8 Access negotiations

Prior to the commencement of the data collection process, the researcher sought for a letter of introduction from the Department of Education Foundations at Chancellor College. The letter was attached to the letters from Ministry of Education and the Division Manager for the South East Education Division (SEED). These permission letters were used when asking for permission to collect data in the selected secondary schools. This is in line with Bell (1993), who states that permission to carry out an investigation must be sought at an early stage. "As soon as you have an agreed project outline and have read enough to convince yourself that the topic is feasible, it is advisable to make a formal written approach to the organizations and individuals concerned outlining your plans,"(Bell,1993, p.47). Copies of letters of permission were also sent to all head teachers of the selected schools and in addition, verbal permission was sought from teachers and learners.

3.9 Ethical issues

Ethical standards were maintained all the time. There was informed consent which Diener and Crandal (1978) define as the procedures in which individuals choose whether or not to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would likely to influence their decisions. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study in advance so as to gain informed consent. Respondents were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study.

3.10 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participants were assured of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the information they were to provide. For anonymity sake, participants were assured that there would be no names recorded but instead letter codes would be used for each respondent. Furthermore, the four schools were given fictitious names as Aliko, Bomba, Chombo and Dowe. This concurs with Borg and Gall (1989) who stipulates that confidentiality must be further protected by not using names of individuals in any publications that result from a research project. They were also assured that the information obtained would be kept confidential and sorely for academic purposes.

3.11 Enhancing credibility and authenticity of the study

To ensure credibility and authenticity of the study, the researcher made use of critical friends at various stages of the study such as proposal writing, instrumentation and findings. Triangulation of methods and sites also helped to enhance reliability and validity. This included the application of different methods like interviews, focus groups,

and observation. Triangulation was also applied by involving different schools, classes and teachers. The researcher is a teacher in South East Education Division and made sure that this would not affect the study negatively by applying phenomenological suspension or bracketing. This was in line with Silverman (2005) who states that the researcher brackets his or her experience with the phenomenon by explaining his or her experiences with and positions on the phenomenon. Direct quotations from respondents were also used to show the authenticity of the study.

3.12 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed the methodological framework that was used in the study. The general approach and data collection methods and how the data was analysed have been included in the chapter. Furthermore, ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study which are pertinent when doing research have been highlighted as well. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to each research question. The purpose of this study was to find out the language learning strategies learners used in English and how these were reflected in their performance. Performance in this study meant the ability of the learner to do well in class exercises, tests and examinations. The strong or weak relationship between language learning strategies and performance was found through comparing above average and below average learners and the language learning strategies they used. As discussed in Chapter 3, learners were classified based on continuous assessment and their end of term tests as below average (below 40%) and above average (65% and above). This chapter is divided into six sections. The first five sections present and discuss findings on each of the five language learning strategies learners were using and how they related with performance. These are cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies. The chapter ends with a summary of key issues.

4.1 Cognitive strategies used by secondary school English learners

The study found that learners used cognitive strategies. They used their mental processes to analyze, remember and synthesise language issues. They were also able to solve language problems and transferred what they learnt to new situations. Some cognitive

language learning strategies were found to be related to performance while others were not. Table 1 shows a summary of the cognitive strategies used by learners.

Table 1: Cognitive strategies used by learners

Cognitive strategies Used	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Practice	43	24
Creating structure for input and output	43	15
Memory	33	30

Out of Oxford's (1990) typology, learners used cognitive language learning strategies of practising, creating structure for input and output and memory. In all the types of cognitive strategies, the number of below average learners who used these strategies was low compared to the above average learners who used them highly. This concurs with Jurkovic, (2008) who found that learners at higher levels of language competence use cognitive strategies more often.

According to Table 1, creating structure for input and output as cognitive strategies were the lowest used by the below average learners. Only 15 out of 48 below average learners used them. The use of cognitive strategies by the below average learners was higher under memorization where 30 below average learners used it. This is because many scored highly under rote memorization as a set of cognitive strategies. The researcher suggests that this could be the reason why such learners were only able to reproduce the class work without understanding. Rote memorization only assisted them to answer the

low order questions resulting into poor performance. The relationship between cognitive sub-strategies and their sets and performance have been discussed further, in the following sections.

4.1.1 Practising strategies

Practice in this case simply means learning by doing the four language skills regularly. With reference to Table 1, more above average learners frequently used practice than the below average learners. That is, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 42 above average and 24 below average learners reported that they practised the English four language skills. Learners were also observed practising the target language. Teachers reported that the inadequate practice by the below average learners was because they were deficient in their knowledge of English which made them inactive in the classroom. Out of the 8 teachers interviewed, 2 reported that some learners were not active because of their beliefs about learning. Learners and mostly the below average had the belief that in the classroom the teacher should be the one dominating and explaining and not leaving them to learn on their own. Asking a below average learner why he was not active in a group, he explained:

> *Ndinabwera kudzaphunzira chifukwa ndine wosadziwa. Pa chifukwa chimenechi sindingathe kuyankha mafunso ndi kuchita zinthu ndekha popanda kuyamba kuphunzitsidwa. Aphunzitsi athu amakonda kutifunsa kuti tikambirane mafunso ovuta asanayambe ndi kuphunzitsa komwe.* (I came to school to learn because I don't know and that is why I cannot find out answers on my own without being taught. Our teacher is fond of asking us to discuss difficult questions before teaching). (Focus group1, Chombo CDSS, 17/08/2010)

The above statements indicate that such learners have a negative attitude with participatory learning. Such being the case they need to be sensitized that practice is the best way to learn a language. Furthermore, interviewing teachers and learners, it was revealed that learners who practiced the four language skills more frequently also performed highly. Commenting on the importance of practice, one teacher explained:

> Practice enhances good performance because learners remember more what they do themselves than what they see and hear. If you observed correctly, most of the learners who performed poorly were those who were not active during practice time, spoke Chichewa in the groups, were writing notes from other subjects while their friends were doing different tasks and in the end they just copied what was discussed and the exercises from friends for marking. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 7/09/2010)

The above statement suggests that the above average learners performed highly because of their efforts to practice in the four language skills. Commenting on practice as a learning strategy, one above average learner said:

> *Ndimayesetsa kuchita chirichonse chimene aphunzitsi atiuza kuti tichite mozipereka, ndi mtima wonse, pandekha kapena mmagulu. Ndimachita practice kuyankhula kumvetsera ndi kulemba mkalasi ndi kunja komwe kuti ndidziwe chingerezi.* (I make sure that I put all my efforts on whatever we are asked to do by the teacher be it in groups or individually. I practice speaking, listening, writing and reading in and outside classroom in order to know English). (Learner 2, Aliko Secondary School, 14/09/2010)

This indicated that practice enhanced performance in the above average learners. This was unlike the below average learners who believed that they would learn only by the teacher predominantly telling them. The findings about the practice of English using the four language skills have further been discussed in Table 2 and the following sections.

Table 2: Practice as a cognitive strategy

Below average Learners out of 48	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Speaking and listening practice	43	18
Writing practice	42	30
Reading practice	44	24

With reference to Table 2, learners used the sub cognitive strategy of practice in speaking, writing, reading and listening. In all the sub-strategies, the study noted differences between the uses of practice strategies. The number of above average learners who used them was very high compared to those below average and the reasons have been given according to each set of strategies. The lowest strategy used by the below average learners was speaking. Only 18 learners out of 48 practiced speaking. The study found a strong relationship between each practising set and performance. These have been discussed in detail in the following sections.

4.1.1.1 Practice in listening and speaking

Through observation and interviews, the study found that learners used the listening and speaking practice strategy. From Table 2, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 43 above average and 18 below average learners used listening and speeking practice as a learning strategy. This shows that the above average learners practiced speaking more frequently than the below average learners. Many below average learners could not get involved in practice. Teachers reported it was because they lacked the capacity to

participate with their limited knowledge of English. The study found that the above average learners practised by speaking to their teachers and peers without being ashamed of their mistakes. One teacher commented on his school's encouragement of the practice strategy saying:

> Learners are encouraged to practise speaking English because at our school, we have a motto which says *defective but effective communication.* This means we insist that learners should speak only English and through mistakes learners will end up being good English speakers. (Teacher 1, Bomba secondary school, 9/09/2010)

The above comments confirm that practice is a very important strategy which can enhance performance in learning. Learners reported that they practised speaking English with friends and teachers in order to be fluent. It was also reported by Aliko and Bomba teachers that debating clubs also helped learners to practise and improve their English speaking. Commenting on the importance of speaking practice, an above average learner explained:

> Practice makes perfect, *munthu umaphunzira chilankhulo pochiyankhula mopanda manyazi kuti usekedwa. Umaphunzira pa zolakwitsa zakozo*. (You learn a language by practising using it without being ashamed of being laughed at. You learn through mistakes). (Learner 4, Aliko secondary school, 07/08/2010)

However, it was also observed and reported that learners and teachers in two schools out of four were not taking speaking practice seriously. Teachers spoke Chichewa to their learners and when teaching, some code-switched to translate. This agrees with Oxford (1990) who found that most of the language teachers did not view communication as a

priority and the few who cared about communication knew little or nothing about how to help their learners to communicate. Asking them why they translated, a teacher said:

> Some of our learners are dull and we speak Chichewa for them to grasp what we are teaching them. (Teacher 2, Dowe CDSS, 17/08/2010)

The above statement shows how some teachers failed to be role models on speaking practice. This negatively affected learners' performance leading to failure to speak English by many learners. It was observed that because of such poor role models, some below average learners used the practice strategy but the quality of the strategy use was low. There was too much of literal translation from Chichewa and code-switching. For example, during a reading comprehension lesson, one below average learner talking about a man who misappropriated funds from his company said:

"*The man ate a lot of money.*"(Observation, Bomba secondary school, 27/07/2010)

This literal translation from Chichewa to English shows the declining standards of English proficiency by many learners because of lack of practice. This result indicates that teachers are to blame for not reinforcing the English speaking rule.

In all the four schools, learners and teachers reported that classroom practice was minimal. They said it was because the English syllabus was loaded; large classes; national examination system which does not examine speaking and listening and teachers' teaching styles which hindered learners from practising. These affected the performance of the learners. Furthermore, it was found that the English speaking rule in 2 out of 4 schools was just on paper. Learners spoke Chichewa in their class groups and

even outside. Asking why they did not practise speaking, learners reported that they liked learning what was examinable in the national examinations and speaking was not part of it. One of the below average learners argued:

> *English ili ndi zinthu zambiri zoti tiphunzire kuti tikhonze mayeso. Chofunika kwambiri ndi* certificate. *Ndimadana ndi kutaya nthawi yambiri ndi kuphunzira zinthu zosafunsa pa mayeso monga kuyankhula chizungu ndi* debate. *(*The English language syllabus is loaded and there are a lot of things to cover in order for us to pass examinations. What is important is obtaining a certificate. I hate wasting more time on things which are not examinable like speaking and debate). (Chombo CDSS, 7/08/2010)

This statement proves that examinations hindered learners from English speaking practice leading to lack of fluency. The study found a strong relationship between speaking practice and performance. All the eight teachers concurred that speaking practice improved performance. The statements reveal that only few secondary schools encourage listening and speaking practice on their learners and force their learners to interact in English. In many schools learners practise in speaking and listening becomes minimal because the learners do not have role models. It could also be because teachers fail to speak in English to their learners and during lessons in two schools, code-switching was common. The other reason for lack of practice in listening and speaking by learners could be that teachers always do not have enough time to finish the syllabus. For example, during every third term, lessons for the form threes are affected during national examination periods when many teachers go for invigilation and marking and also many schools do not have enough classrooms to teach while examinations are in progress. To prepare their learners for examinations, teachers ignore listening and speaking lessons and concentrate on grammar and writing. They also make their lessons more of teacher

centred in order to teach many things within a short time. This hinders the learners from practice. Because of the idea that what is important is passing examinations, some learners also react or become less involved when a teacher spends more time on teaching listening and speaking skills which are not examined.

4.1.1.2 Practice in English writing

The study found that learners used writing practice as a learning strategy. With reference to Table 2, 42 above and 30 below average learners practiced writing. The results show variations between the two groups of learners. The above average learners still used this strategy highly. Commenting on the writing of exercises, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndimayesetsa kulemba* exercise *iri yonse yomwe tapatsidwa ndi aphunzitsi. Izi zimathandiza kudziwa ngatidi tamva kapena ayi ndipo timachita* correction *pa zomwe talakwa. Ndimayesetsa kuchita* practice *kalembedwe ka* composition *pa ma* topic *osiyana siyana tikaweluka ndi kukapereka kwa aphunzitsi kuti achite* mark *ndi kundithandiza.* Practice *imandithandiza kukhoza kwambiri ma* composition. (I make sure I write all the exercises given by the teacher. This helps me to judge if I have learnt the material or not and I make corrections on the questions which I get wrong. I try to practice writing compositions after classes and I give them to the teacher for marking and assistance. This helps me to perform highly on compositions). (Aliko secondary school, 24/09/2010)

The quotation shows that the above average learners were very active and committed to learning the writing skill. The above average learners also always led in class assignments. For example, in group compositions at Chombo, the above average learners dominated. They were the ones elected to be group leaders and secretaries. Some below average learners were seen copying notes for other subjects and others were quiet. The

differences between the above and below average could be because in schools with large classes like Chombo and Dowe, there was little following up to check if all learners handed in their work. This resulted in many below average learners not writing the assignments which they usually found difficult. One language teacher explained that it was because getting few assignments from learners eased their marking. Another teacher also reported that due to large classes some teachers were not checking if all learners handed in their assignments. To ease their work, they also minimised the number of exercises and questions. This promoted lack of writing practice by the learners. Commenting on limited exercises, a teacher said:

> With the problem of large classes, we try to minimize exercises and the number of questions to reduce the marking load. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 9/09/2010)

The above comment suggests that in schools with large classes, writing practice was minimal. Teachers preferred learners to do exercises orally to writing or just asked them to answer few questions in writing. Learners at Dowe reported that some teachers marked the exercises late and others did not give feedback after tests indicating that they did not mark. This discouraged some learners from practising writing. This agrees with Kyriacou (1998) who states that the way in which learners' work is marked, recorded and reported has an impact on learners' subsequent motivation. However, according to Table 2, out of all the practice strategies it showed that below average learners scored highly on writing practice. It was suggested that it could be because writing all exercises from the teacher was compulsory in most of the secondary schools. Learners were observed being sent out because of not writing assignments at Aliko secondary school. The study revealed that

the below average learners were not contributing much during group writing assignments. Such learners read books from other subjects; others refused the writing responsibility in the group because they could not write correctly. Observation also showed that the high performers finished earlier and went for marking. The low performers handed in their work late. Asked why they handed in their class work late, one below average learner explained:

> *Timadikira ozidziwawo alembe kaye kenaka nafe tilembe.* (We wait for those who know the answers to write first so that we can copy from them). (Learner 8, Dowe CDSS 7/9/2010)

In the congested classrooms, the study revealed that more than 90% of the below average learners got the entire exercise questions correct because of copying from each other. This shows they did not practise the class work adequately and this led to lack of retrieval and application during tests ending up failing. The study found a strong relationship between writing practice and performance. The English writing skill was important because it was examined. Teachers encouraged it by forming writing clubs but it was always the above average learners that joined them to practise meaningful writing. The above average learners that practiced writing performed highly. This shows that learners practised writing and the above average learners who were more knowledgeable assisted the below average to perform well in the classroom. This is in line with constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1962) concerning the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where the less knowledgeable learners perform better when assisted than doing the activities on their own. The statements from teachers above also indicate that learners' practice in writing especially in compositions sometimes does not receive feedback, learners who do

MALAWI COLLECTION

not write exercises are rarely followed up and that teachers give limited exercises to reduce their marking load. The findings present the opposite of what teachers are expected of professionally. Generally teachers are supposed to be hard working and committed. This negligence of their duties affects learners' performance.

4.1.1.3 Practice in English reading and performance

The study found that learners used practice in English reading as a language learning strategy. With reference to Table 2 above, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 44 above and 24 below average learners used this strategy. This reveals that the above average learners practiced highly because of motivation and higher knowledge of English. The below average were not practising much because they had language difficulties and lacked motivation.They did not like reading practice because of failing to apply intelligent guessing and had limited vocabulary. They were not taking reading lessons seriously. For example, observing a lesson at Dowe, the below average learners joined groups slowly and others did not even bother to go where the books were. Others sat on the opposite side of the books making them to read words upside down. This made learners fail to comprehend the passage. Commenting why they did not take reading seriously, a below average learner said:

> *Mabuku omwe timawerenga ndi ovuta ndipo aphunzitsi athu sadziwa kuphunzitsa. Koma amatiumirizidwa kuchita* practise *kuwerenga pa zomwe sitingamvetse patokha. (*The books we read have difficult passages, the teacher does not know how to teach but we are forced to practice what we do not understand on our own). (Dowe secondary school, 17/08/2010)

The above statement shows lack of motivation by the below average learners to apply practice strategies of reading and listening. These learners explained that the teacher did not know how to teach because she used learner-centred teaching which they found difficult because they did not like doing things by themselves. Four teachers suggested that the lack of practice in reading by some below average learners could also be because of the quality of learners selected to their schools who did not pass well in their national examinations and others who just found places after failing the examinations. During a reading lesson, differences in behaviour between the above and below average learners were also noted. The below average learners were not active while the successful ones were active and read seriously. They guessed intelligently about the story and answered pre-reading questions very well. Learners reported that they practised reading by utilizing their school libraries. They read novels, short stories and magazines. Commenting on reading, one above average learners said:

> *Kuwerenga ndi kumvetsa nkhani ndikofunika* practice *chifukwa comprehension imabwera pa mayeso. Kuwerenga kumatithandizanso kudziwa mawu atsopano achizungu amene tingagwiritse ntchito polemba kapena kumva ndi kulankhula. Masiku ano* literature *inasakanizidwa ndi language ndiye timayenera kuwerenga kwambiri kuti titsirize mabukuwa ndi kuwamvetsa. Kuwerenga kumatithandiza kukhoza bwino pa mayeso.* (Reading practice is important because comprehension is examinable. It also helps us to widen our knowledge of vocabulary which can be applied in the other skills like speaking and writing. With the combination of English language and literature, we are forced to read seriously in order to finish and understand the novels. Reading helps us to perform well in examinations). (Learner 4, Bomba secondary school, 11/09/2010)

The statements by this above average learner show that they were very committed to reading in order to perform well during examinations. This led to their success.

Asking teachers on how learners used reading as a LLS one of them explained:

> Reading is very important to the learners' success. The language subject was merged with literature and without serious reading learners cannot analyse the books. The above average read seriously all the time while the below average panic to memorise in the last minute. This leads to their failure. (Chombo secondary school 23/09/2010)

The above quotation shows that examination influenced learners to read seriously. The study found a strong relationship between reading practice and performance. Reading for comprehension is examined in the national examinations and the above average students that were observed practising it seriously in the classroom performed highly. In summary of practice, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of practice using the four language skills. The study found a strong relationship between practice and performance. The above average learners were successful because they practiced what they learnt. The lack of adequate practice in the four language skills made the below average learners perform poorly and score less than half despite other factors.

4.1.2 Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy

Creating structure for input and output is the making and arranging for both comprehension and production of the target language (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table .1 on page 48, 43 above average and 15 below average learners used this strategy. The figures indicate that more above average learners used this strategy than the below average ones. Under this sub-cognitive strategy, learners used two sets of sub-strategies

which were note taking and summary and highlighting. These have further been explained in Table 3 and the sections following.

Table 3: Creating structure for input and output as a cognitive strategy

Creating structure for input and output strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Note-taking and summary	31	5
Highlighting	28	25

With reference to Table 3 above, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of creating a structure for input and output. Under this sub-strategy, learners used note-taking and summary and highlighting as cognitive sub-strategy sets. The number of above average learners who used all these sets of strategies was much higher compared to those who were below average. The reasons for the high and low use of these strategies have been explained according to each set. As indicated in Table 3, the study found a strong relationship between note-taking and summary and performance. A weak relationship was found between highlighting and performance. These have been discussed in detail in the following sub-section

4.1.2.1 Note-taking and summary

Observation and interviews revealed that 31 above average learners and only 5 below average learners used the strategy of note-making and summary. This shows the above average learners led in the use of this strategy. This could be because they were focused in their learning. The below average learners hardly used these strategies. The study

found that it was because of their deficiency in the English language and inadequate use of their mental processes. The above average ones used note taking and summary and the following statement asserts the use of note-taking and summary.

> Taking notes and summarizing what the teachers say make me pay attention and have a record of what was said in class. I also know what was not covered in class. (Focus group, Chombo secondary school, 20/09/2010).

In order to create a structure for the input and output, learners took notes involving their mental processes to write down the specific points when given a passage or listening to it orally. The above average learners took notes on what they heard and read. They were also good at summarizing long passages compared to the below average learners. Note-making and summarizing were examinable during national examinations and this forced them to learn this strategy although the below average learners still failed. As evidence of this, a below average learner explained:

> *Ine sinditha kuchita zinthu ziwiri nthawi imodzi monga kumvetsera ndi kulemba. Nthawi zonse ndimalephera* note-taking *ndi* summary *pa mayeso chifukwa sindizimvetsa kalembedwe kache.* (I fail to do two things at a time listening to the teacher and taking notes. I fail note taking and summary during tests because I don't understand how to do them). (Dowe CDSS, learner 4, 24/09/2010)

The statement above revealed that the below average learners used note-taking and summary strategies miserably and incorrectly leading to their failure.

Commenting on the relationship between note-taking and summary and performance, a teacher said:

> Note-taking and summarizing are advanced strategies. Although they are taught, only the above average learners know how to use them resulting in high performance. Many below average students fail because they can hardly spell out words on their own (Teacher 2 Bomba secondary school, 24/09/2010)

The study revealed a strong relationship between note-making and summary and performance. The two skills were examinable and failure to understand them led to examination failure hence poor performance. Learners who used the strategy were highly successful. From these sentiments, the above average learners used their mental processes more than the below average whose thinking capacity seemed weak to process information. Relating to the information processing model, the above average learners were successful because their minds took in the information and organised it to be retrieved at a later time. A number of the below average learners received the information incorrectly. Due to their limited knowledge of English, they failed to organise and summarize it. They could not store what their teachers and books taught them on how to make notes and summaries. This led to lack of retrieval resulting into failure.

4.1.2.2 Highlighting

With reference to Table 3, observation and interviews also showed that 28 above average and 25 below average learners out of 96 highlighted important information and main points in their exercise books. This shows that the above average learners slightly used the highlighting strategy more highly than the below average learners. This could be because of their commitment to learning. Compared to the other strategies for creating a

structure for the input and output, the below average performed highly on this strategy. This was because highlighting was easy and did not require a lot of thinking. The researcher's observation revealed that in all the schools 53 out of 96 learners had red, black, blue and green pens and pencils for writing and highlighting. Learners also bolded the main points with the same colour or a different one. The red pen was also used to highlight main points in the teachers' notes, passages during examinations and in their personal books. When they were asked why they highlighted, one of the above average learners said:

> *Kukongoletsa ndi kuwalitsa mitu ya notes kumathandiza kuti tizichita study mosavuta. Zimatithandizanso kuwerenga ma* main points *mwachangu ndi kuyesa kukumbukira ma* sub points. *Sitivutikanso tikamafuna* information *mofulumira. (*Highlighting main points makes our studying easy. It also helps us to read a point quickly and try to remember the sub points and search for information easily). (Focus group 2, Dowe secondary school, 12/08/2010)

Asking a below average learner why highlighting was important, she said:

> *Kuwalitsa kumathandiza* notes *zanga kukhala zokongola ndikusangalatsa poziona (*Highlighting helps to make my notes beautiful to look at). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 12/08/2010)

From the above comments, learners used highlighting for different purposes. The above average learners used it mainly to assist them when studying while this below average learner mainly used them for beauty. Out of 8 teachers, 5 reported that highlighting as a strategy had a weak relationship with performance. Learners highlighted but others could not apply other strategies like reviewing seriously to enhance their performance. It was reported that the below average learners who also used this strategy mainly used it for the

decoration of their exercise books. Some were found doing it while lessons were in progress. This sometimes hindered them from using other strategies. Commenting on highlighting and performance relationship, a teacher explained:

> Highlighting does not enhance high performance because there are some above average learners who just write their notes neatly without highlighting but perform very well. Highlighting is an easy strategy which can work depending on the individual and only if combined with other strategies. The below average just get interested to highlight and hardly use the notes. Others highlight during lessons instead of listening to the teacher. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 7/09/2010)

The above quotations indicate that highlighting as a cognitive set was one of the strategies which the below average learners used most but still performed poorly. This shows that highlighting on its own without other manipulative skills does not enhance performance. It was revealed that the above average learners combined highlighting with other manipulative language learning strategies in order to succeed. In summary, learners used the sub-cognitive strategy of creating a structure for input and output which consisted of the cognitive sets of note-making and summary and highlighting. The study revealed a strong relationship between note-making and summary and performance. A weak relationship was revealed between highlighting and performance.

4.1.3 Memorization

With reference to Table 1 on page 48, out of the 96 learners interviewed, 33 above average and 30 below average learners used memorization as a cognitive strategy. Differences were noted between the below and above average learners in their choice of memory strategies which resulted into the success of the above average and the failure of

the below average. Learners reported that memory helped them to be able to understand the spoken and written language and to produce it in speaking and writing. In support of this, a teacher explained:

> Without memory, there cannot be achievement because there cannot be retrieval of what learners learn in order to pass examinations. (Teacher 1, Dowe CDSS 15/09/2010)

The memory strategies which learners used have further been clarified in Table 4.

Table 4: Memorization as a sub-cognitive strategy

Memory strategies	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Rote memorization	19	44
Reviewing work done	47	16

Based on Table 4, learners used memory strategies of rote memorization and reviewing work done in order to remember what they learnt. The below average learners used rote memorization more highly than the above average ones and the above average learners greatly used reviewing of the work done as a memory strategy. The study found a weak relationship between rote memorization and performance because those who used it very highly performed poorly. They failed tests miserably if the same questions were twisted a bit because they lacked the capacity to reason and understand the material. There was a strong relationship between reviewing work done and performance. Learners who reviewed their work seriously remembered and understood what was learnt resulting in

meaningful learning. The memory strategies learners used are further discussed in the sections below.

4.1.3.1 Rote memorization

Rote memorization as a strategy was reported by learners and teachers but it was not found in the different authors' typology. With reference to Table 4, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 19 above average and 44 below average learners used rote memorization. The study found that this cognitive set was highly used by the below average learners. The high degree of use especially by the below average was because learners were learning with an aim to pass examinations rather than to know English. The study found that rote memorization mostly without understanding was common among below average learners.The following excerpt from a below average learner shows why below average learners relied much on rote memorization.

> *Tikamalephera kukumbukira zomwe tikuwerenga ndiponso zotivuta mwachitsanzo ma* preposition *ndi* order of adjectives *timangoyamba kuloweza kuti tingokhoza mayeso.*(If we cannot remember what we study and what we find difficult, for example, prepositions and order of adjectives, we just turn to serious memorization even if we do not understand them in order to pass examinations). (Learner 4, Dowe secondary school, 7/09/2010)

However, Wenden and Rubin (1987) states that the learner who automatically relies on rote memorization may fail to perceive the inherent meaningfulness of the material to be remembered. It was found that below average learners relied much more on this strategy than the other memory strategies but still failed. The above average learners not only used it but also combined it with other strategies to make their learning meaningful. They

reported that they used rote memorization when they met long lists of the material which they could not remember in a test or an examination. As evidence of this, an above average learner explained:

> *Kuti tikhoze kwambiri, mayeso akakhala pafupi timaloweza zinthu zomwe sitikuzimva kapena kuzikumbukira* for example, long lists and rules *ndi* grammar *monga* order of adjectives in a noun phrase *ndi ma* preposition. *Zina zonse timazikumbukira pozimvetsa mkalasi, kuchita* practice *ndi kuziwerenga kwambiri.* (In order to succeed, rote memorization helps us to remember long lists, order of some rules and confusing grammar mainly in times of tests and examinations. For example, the order of adjectives in a noun phrase and prepositions. Most of the topics we learn are remembered through understanding in class, practising and reading). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

When the teachers were interviewed, six out of eight reported that rote learning did not enhance permanent performance because the below average learners who used it frequently were failures. Learners easily failed what they memorized if the wording of the questions or order was changed. In many instances, they ended up giving back what they memorized on a wrong question because of lack of understanding and application.

As evidence of this, one teacher said:

> Rote memorization is highly used by the below average as a memory strategy but it does not help them to pass examinations because when questioning order and language is changed, they fail to think and relate (Aliko secondary school 3/10/2010)

From the above quotations, rote memorization was highly used by the below average learners to remember work done in order to give the same back during examinations word for word without understanding. The 44 out of 48 below average learners who used rote memorisation reported they used it because of not having enough time and too much

work that made them just memorise when examinations were near. This resulted in their failure. Out of the 48 above average learners, 19 reported that they used rote memorization only when they had long lists and in order to perform better. The remaining 28 did not use rote memorization but stored the long lists through practising and reviewing for a period of time. When the teachers were asked, it was reported that rote memorization did not enhance performance and they discouraged it as an archaic strategy of learning among secondary school learners. Instead they encouraged their learners to understand the material and work hard all the time instead of working hard the last minute when they heard about the impending examinations. Rote memorization is not in line with constructivism which states that the purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning and not just memorizing right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1.3.2 Reviewing work done

Reviewing means going over work done at carefully spaced intervals, close together and then more widely spaced apart. This is also called spiralling (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 4, 47 out of 48 above average and only 16 out of 48 below average learners used this strategy in order to remember what they learnt. This shows that the above average learners used this strategy very highly. Few of the below average used this strategy. The below average ones failed to review their work seriously and many gave excuses of lack of time. Others sighted household chores, distance from their homes, blackouts and lack of electricity in their homes. This could be because the below average failed to organize their time to review. Teachers reported that the below average learners

were always procrastinating although they were reminded that procrastination was an enemy of academic excellence. Asking them why they failed to review their work seriously, one of the below average learners said:

> *Timalephera kuwerenga nsanga zomwe tangoziphunzira chifukwa zochita ndi zambiri ndipo nthawi sipezeka. Timakhala tikuphunzira nthawi zonse nthawi zina ndi usiku omwe.* (We fail to review the work done because there is too much work and we do not find time to review the work done seriously. We are always learning and sometimes we have night classes). (Learner 6, Bomba secondary school, 27/08/2010)

However, the above average learners reported that reviewing the work done on the four language skills helped them to store the information in the long term memory. This is in line with the information processing model which states that for learning to take place, information must be stored in the long term memory so that it can be retrieved when required. Answering why they reviewed their work, an above average learner also said:

> *Ndimawerenga* notes *zanga tikangotha kuphunzira* English *chifukwa ndimaopa kuti pakapita nthawi ndiziiwala.*I review my short notes soon after the English class because I can forget easily if it takes long. (Learner 4 Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

The statements show that the above average planned their time well but with the same environment the below average complained about time to review their work. It was reported by all teachers that reviewing work done improved learners' memory and understanding resulting in meaningful learning and higher performance. Teachers reported that they always reminded their learners about the importance of this strategy but few below average learners reviewed seriously. This affected their performance negatively.

Commenting on the relationship between reviewing work done and performance, a teacher explained:

> Reviewing work done aims at over learning the material in order to be so familiar with the information so that it becomes natural and automatic. This makes the material to be retained in the long term memory and to retrieve it easily during examinations leading to learners' high performance. (Teacher 1, Dowe secondary school, 28/07/2010)

The study found a strong relationship between reviewing work done and learners' performance. The above average students who reviewed their work seriously were successful. This showed that reviewing work done contributed to their success. Learners who were lazy in reviewing their work failed.

In summary of cognitive strategies, the study found a strong relationship between practice in the four language skills, note-making and summary and reviewing work done with how learners performed. However the study found a weak relationship between rote memorization and highlighting with performance.

4.2 Compensation strategies used by secondary school learners

The study found that learners used compensation strategies to make up for their inadequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Compensation strategies used by learners

Compensation Strategies	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Code-switching	23	31
Delaying when Speaking	40	30
Avoiding Communication	22	40

The study found that both above and below average learners used code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication in order to compensate for their limited knowledge of spoken English. The table also shows the learners who used this strategy. The below average learners from all types of schools rarely practiced speaking. This resulted into such learners code-switching to Chichewa highly and avoiding communication whenever a chance to speak arose. Despite their high use of these strategies, the below average learners performed poorly. In comparison with the below average students, the above average used delaying when speaking highly and few used code-switching and avoiding communication. This reveals that the above average students made efforts to remain in the English conversations. The study further found a weak relationship between all the compensation strategies the learners used and performance.

4.2.1 Code-switching

With reference to Table 5, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 23 above average and 31 below average learners code-switched to Chichewa when speaking English. This

shows that the strategy was used by the below average learners more than the above average learners. Asking how code-switching assisted them, a below average learner said:

> *Kusakaniza Chichewa ndi chizungu kumatithandiza kuti nkhani isathele pompo pamene mau a chizungu athawa m'mutu. Zimatithandizanso kumvetsa zomwe akutiphunzitsa mosavuta.* (Code switching to Chichewa helps us to continue a conversation even when we cannot recall the appropriate structure of English words. It also helps us to understand new content and new knowledge is transmitted effectively). (Chombo secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Code-switching to Chichewa was common when learners were communicating with their peers and teachers. Learners at Dowe CDSS were observed reading the passage in English but discussing the contents in Chichewa and English. Asked why they code-switched, one above average learner said:

> *Timayankhula m'Chichewa kuti aliyense athe kupereka maganizo mosavuta Tikakambirana m'chizungu ambiri sayankha ndipo samamva.Timalankhula chizungu pokachita* present *ndi polankhula ndi aphunzitsi. (*We turn to Chichewa so that all of us should contribute freely. If we use English only, many will not understand and contribute. We make sure that we use only English when presenting and speaking to the teacher). (Dowe CDSS, 3/10/2010)

The study found a weak relationship between code-switching and performance because although it partly enhanced speech performance by helping learners to remain in a conversation, spoken English was not examinable. In addition, the below average who mostly used it performed poorly in all the four language skills.

Commenting on code-switching and its failure to enhance learning, a teacher said:

> If over used, code-switching discourage learners from practising the target language because they end up using few English words and more Chichewa words. (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

It was reported that learners code-switched in the classroom frequently because they were spoilt during their early years of learning English in that there was no speech practice and encouragement. According to the secondary school objectives for English language learning, by form three learners were supposed to communicate in English fluently (Malawi Institute of Education, 2002). Teachers explained that to overcome this challenge, they tried to help learners' practice by making sure code-switching is not overdone and is phased out in the English language classroom as learners advanced. This was done by encouraging learners to use simple words to communicate.

The results show that on average, the below average learners code-switched more than the above average ones. This could be because of their knowledge of English language which was more limited than was the case with the other group. The statements also indicate that teachers and above average learners code-switched for solidarity in order to help the below average understand and with time they got used. These results agree with Kalong (2008) who found that people code-switch for solidarity as well as to signal group membership and local identification. This is also in line with Vygotsky's constructivist theory which states that the knowledgeable assist the less knowledgeable to learn.

4.2.2 Delaying when speaking

Out of 96 learners interviewed, 70 said that in order to overcome their limitations in speaking, they delayed the speech using words like "mmm", "aaaa", "eeem" in order to have enough time to think about what to say. Others delayed while scratching their heads. Out of the 96 interviewed, 40 above average and 30 below average learners used this strategy.

A below average learner explained:

> *Kulankhula mochedwetsa kumathandiza kuti tisankhe mawu tisanayankhule kuopa kuchita manyazi tikalephera* (Delaying in speaking English helps us to select our vocabulary before speaking to avoid being embarrassed). (Bomba secondary school, 3/10/2010)

The above average learners tried to speak in English more regularly than the below average ones. As evidence of delaying when speaking, one above average learner reported:

> I scratch my head when I am in problems with speaking and then say what ever comes out. (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 21/07/2010)

Teachers said that there was a weak relationship between delaying in speaking and performance because speaking was not examinable. When commenting on this fact, a teacher said:

> Delaying in speaking makes the speaker remember what to say next but it does not enhance performance directly because speaking is not examined in English here in Malawi. (Teacher 2, Dowe secondary school, 17/08/2010)

MALAWI COLLECTION

Such sentiments suggest that teachers should assist learners to speak English by being role models and giving encouragement to learners that speaking should be taken seriously because competence in spoken English is the main qualification for a lot of jobs (Matiki, 2001).

4.2.3 Avoiding communication partially or totally

The study observed that learners avoided communication in English especially when difficulties and embarrassment were anticipated. With reference to Table 5, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 22 above average and 40 below average learners avoided communicating in English. The below average ones were observed avoiding communicating in English. For example, they said they hated going to the staff room because teachers would communicate to them in English. When there was a need to go to the staff room, they were spotted rehearsing what to say.

Commenting on why they avoided communication, a below average learner said:

> *Kuyankhula chizungu ndisakudziwa kumandisowetsa mtendere. Izi zimandichititsa kuzemba anthu okonda kuyankhula mu chizungu monga aphunzitsi. Nthawi zina amatimoka, kutikonza kapena kutifunsa chizungu pamaso pa aphunzitsi ena ndiponso anzathu. Tikalakwitsa amatikumbukira ndi ma* mistakes *amenewo ndipo nthawi zina limasanduka dzina lathu.*

(Using English when I do not know it very well makes me feel tense. This makes me avoid communicating in the language with people who know it very well like teachers to avoid being embarrassed. Some of these teachers mock, correct and test us with questions in front of other teachers and learners. If we make an English grammar mistake, we are remembered with that mistake and sometimes it becomes our name). (Learner 1, Chombo secondary school, 8/08/2010)

In the classroom, some of such learners did not raise their hands even if they knew the answers. Teachers had to force them to answer questions. The study found a weak relationship between avoiding communication and performance. It was reported that this strategy reduced efforts by learners to practice the target language. Tarone (1977) also noted that avoiding communication as a strategy is not directly related to learning because it does not address areas of confusion. Concurring with the above statement an above average learner said:

Ndimaona kuti kuli bwino kumayesetsa kulankhula ngati mmene achitira mwana chifukwa timaphunzira kuchokera pa ma mistakes *athu (It* is better to keep on trying to speak like a child than to avoid communication because we learn from our mistakes). (Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

The statements clearly show that it was mostly the below average learners who failed to speak English and used avoiding communication strategy most unlike the above average who tried. Although avoiding communication as a learning strategy has an advantage of keeping the learner emotionally protected, it goes against the aim of speaking and as such it cannot promote any language learning skill. This means learners should just be

encouraged to interact in English by encouraging them that learning comes through mistakes.

Overall, the study found that learners used compensation strategies of code-switching, delaying when speaking and avoiding communication. The study found a weak relationship between all the compensation strategies the learners used and performance.

4.3 Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners

The study revealed that learners used meta-cognitive strategies and that all the meta-cognitive strategies learners used promoted their performance. The meta-cognitive strategies which the learners used and their relationship with performance have further been discussed and analyzed in Table 6 and the sections that follow.

Table 6: Meta-cognitive strategies used by learners

Meta-cognitive Strategy	**Above Average learners out of 48**	**Below Average Learners out of 48**
Paying attention	45	40
Planning	43	19
Evaluating	36	12

With reference to Table 6, learners used the sub-strategies of paying attention, arranging and planning for their learning and evaluating their learning. Both types of learners were

rated highly on attention. However, only the above average learners were rated highly on planning. Lastly, the above average learners evaluated their learning but the below average ones also lagged behind. The meta- cognitive sub- strategies learners used and how they were related to their performance have been analyzed and discussed further in the following sections.

4.3.1 Paying attention

The study revealed that paying attention was the highest used sub-strategy by all types of learners in the whole study. It was found that 45 out of 48 above average and 40 out of 48 below average learners used this meta-cognitive strategy. Results revealed that the first step in managing the learning of English was to pay attention to details and become part of the learning process. It was learnt that this strategy was highly used because in the classrooms, paying attention was compulsory and those who disturbed mostly did it without the knowledge of the teacher. On the importance of this strategy, a teacher explained:

> Paying attention to what is said in the classroom is the first step to success. A learner who misses English classes hardly performs very well. The below average learners pay attention but some do not understand. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 27/08/2010)

All teachers during interviews reported that learners showed their attention by being quiet and facing the teacher to capture the mouth and the body language.

Teacher 1 from Bomba during interviews said this about the evidence of attention:

> If you move to another place learners' eyes follow. (Bomba secondary school, 28/09/2010)

Observation revealed that in every class, learners used this strategy of paying attention mostly during listening and speaking. One of the above average learners during the individual learner interview commented on what he did in order to pay attention in detail.

> *Ndimayesetsa kupewa khalidwe lokhala mkalasi koma maganizo ali kutali. Ndimayesetsa kuiwala mavuto anga ndikungoganiza za kuphunzira ndi kumangomvetsera. (*I try to avoid the tendency of being physically in class but mentally and emotionally being thousands of kilometres away. I make sure I forget my worries, just think of the lesson and pay attention). (Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Through observation, it was found that learners used this strategy very much especially at Aliko and Bomba secondary schools. The high numbers of both above and below average learners paying attention revealed that the strategy was a very important tool for learning. To capture everything in the classroom, learners were very organized with pens and exercise books for English and just before the lesson began, there was silence. Learners from Bomba were observed resisting dozing by standing up at the back of the class in order not to miss anything. However, observation showed that at Chombo CDSS, there were 5 learners out of a class of 67 and at Dowe School, 15 out of 100 learners on average who were not attentive. Some were copying notes for different subjects while others disturbed their classmates by making noise.

The study found that paying attention had a high and strong relationship with performance. Out of the 48 above average learners, 26 reported that they were not forced to be attentive but consciously wanted to remain focussed in order to achieve their goals. Thinking about their goals made them more attentive and this resulted into high performance. The below average learners used attention highly but performed poorly and it was reported that it was because they pretended to be attentive because it was a must to be quiet and face the teacher. Teachers reported that a number of below average learners looked attentive for fear of the teacher but were not focussed. For example, they were observed failing to answer questions asked on what the teacher had just said. This lack of focus contributed to their failure. Asking a below average learner why she failed after being observed looking very attentive, she said:

> *Ndimaoneka ngati ndikumvetsera koma maganizo anga amakhala pa mavuto omwe ndimakomana nawo pa moyo wanga monga umphawi ndi kusalidwa ndi anzanga* (I look very attentive but my mind switches to my worries about life. For example, I think about poverty and rejection by peers). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

Commenting on whether below average learners paid attention in class, teachers concurred that some learners perform poorly because they fail to concentrate on learning but think about their family misfortunes. They get emotionally affected even after counselling them. According to the information processing model, paying attention is the first step and the most important. The way the information has been received will determine if the brain has processed and stored the correct information or not. If incorrect information is stored it will be retrieved during examinations leading to low performance.

Such being the case, learners need to be serious and interact with friends and teachers on where they are not clear before the learnt material is stored in the long term memory.

4.3.2 Organizing and planning for one's learning

With reference to Table 6 above, this meta- cognitive strategy was used by 43 above average and only 19 below average learners. All teachers reported that learners who used this strategy seriously performed considerably well. Concurring with this, a teacher explained:

> We encourage planning their learning because it enhances their performance and that lack of it is planning to fail. (Bomba secondary school, 15/9/2010)

The sub- strategies learners used have further been discussed in Table 7.

Table 7: Organizing and planning as a meta-cognitive strategy

Organizing and planning for one's learning strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Organizing their Learning	46	26
Finding out about Learning	44	18
Goal setting	39	13

Within the organizing and planning for one's learning strategy, learners used the sub-strategy sets of organizing, finding out about language learning and setting goals. In all the meta-cognitive sets, the above average learners were rated highly compared to the below average ones.The study found a strong relationship between all the organizing and

planning sets and performance. The organizing and planning sets are further discussed in detail.

4.3.2.1 Organizing

This involves the organising of one's schedule, physical environment like space, temperature, sound, lighting and a language note book (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 7, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed 46 above average and 26 below average used this strategy. This shows that the above average ones used it more than the below average ones. Teachers suggested that this could be because the above average learners were more focused on their learning than the others who lacked motivation. The above average learners reported that they organized their materials by collecting and classifying them by topic, grammatical pattern or language skill for easy reference. They organized their time such that everything was done on time. For example, they were observed sitting quietly with English exercise books and pens ready and were attentive to their teacher. On what they did to get organized, an above average learner reported:

> *Timachita dongosolo powerengeratu zokaphunzira mawa lake kukonzekera kukafunsa ndi kuyankha mafunso mkalasi. Tikapatsidwa zoti tichite timaika mapoints mu ndondomeko. Mwachitsanzo zokayankhula, ma* composition note-making and summary *timaziika mu ndondomeko kuti zigwirizane komanso kuti tisabwereze bwereze. (*We start getting organized by reading about the coming topic in advance ready to answer and ask questions on the lesson. When we are given activities to do, we organize points before doing any task. For example, in public speeches, compositions, note making, summaries, we organize in order to write coherently and avoid repetitions). (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 9/09/2010)

All types of learners reported that they organized their learning by having a language note book to write what they encountered in language learning and making study time tables in order to schedule regular practice for each language skill. Commenting on the importance of having the time table, another above average learner explained:

> *Ndimakopera* timetable *ya mkalasi ndi kuigwiritsa ntchito popanga yanga kuti ndiziwerenga phunziro lisanafike kapena titangophunzira kumene. Izi zimatithandiza pochita dongosolo monga kulemberatu homework ndi kutenga mabuku oyenelera.* (I copy the class time table and use it to come up with my own study time table in order to study subjects before and after the class. This helps me to be organized by writing assignments required in the coming lesson and carrying the right materials). (Aliko focus group 2, 30/07/2010)

However, a number of learners from Chombo and Dowe schools reported that they had the time tables but failed to follow them because of disturbances like friends, lack of electricity in their homes, black outs, household chores and mare procrastination. As evidence of this, a below average learner reported:

> *Ma* timetable *ochitira zinthu tiri nawo koma timalephera kuwatsata bwinobwino. Nthawi zina timachedwa ndi zibalo, timachokera kutali, komanso nthawi zina timangozengereza chifukwa chocheza komanso kutanganidwa ndi ntchito za pakhomo. Chinanso ma* blackouts, *kutentha, udzudzu ndi kusowa ndalama zogulira ma* torch *zimasokoneza ndondomeko ya zinthu. (*We have the time tables for different activities but to follow them correctly is a problem. Sometimes we delay with punishments, others come from very far and sometimes we just postpone activities due to chatting with friends and house hold chores. On the organisation of the learning environment, black outs, the hot weather, mosquitoes and lack of money to get lamps and torches make us fail to get organised and do things on time). (Dowe CDSS, 18/09/2010)

These statements indicate that the below average learners had a poor organisation of activities and that they were lazy and not motivated. The above average learners who were focussed could easily avoid the punishments and schedule time for chatting with friends and do household chores. Some above average learners had similar situations but their plans were achieved. All teachers reported that getting organized helped learners to understand and led to their higher performance. Getting organized in their learning also made learners perform well during tests and examinations because they got organized in advance. Commenting on organisation, one teacher explained:

> Many below average learners are not organised. They do things in panic in the last minute and they end up doing things quickly and not well done. Examples of these things could be preparation for examinations, assignments, and even the next class. Some come to class and stay idle without writing exercises saying they have forgotten their pens and exercise books. (Teacher 2, Chombo CDSS, 10/10/2010)

The above sentiments reveal that getting organised and prepared for learning and examinations is an important step to high performance. It is necessary for teachers to train learners on time management and how to detect and avoid time wasters.

4.3.2.2 Finding out about their learning

Finding out about their learning means the learners' self management or understanding the conditions that help one learn and arrange for those conditions (Ellis, 1994). Learners reported that finding out about their learning as a strategy helped them to get organized. In line with table 7, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 44 above average and 18 below average used this strategy. This shows that few below average learners

used this strategy. Teachers suggested that it could be because the below average always wanted to be told and reminded and were not ready to find out things for themselves. They liked to be spoon fed on everything. Learners were reminded that they had the responsibility of finding out about their language learning. For example, learners aired out things which hindered their language learning through their prefects and class teachers to the authorities. For example, they reported the persistent absenteeism of their language teacher, shortage of language books and the teachers' teaching in relation to national examination system among the hindrances. On what they did to find out about their learning, one above average learner explained:

> *Timafufuza m'mene mayeso adzakhalire, m'mene aphunzitsi akuphunzitsira pofanizira ndi syllabus, mabuku ofunika ndi zoyenera kuchita kuti tizikhoze. Timakaperekanso madandaulo kwa achikulire athu pa zinthu zomwe zikusokoneza maphunziro.* (We find out the nature of the national examinations, the pace teachers take in relation to the syllabus, required text books and what to do to improve our performance. We also air out the things that hinder our learning to the authorities). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 18/09/2010)

Commenting on learners' responsibility for their learning, a teacher explained:

> The strongest inspector is the learner him or herself. Learners are able to know if teaching and learning is taking place or not and if the teaching will help them achieve their goal of passing examinations and not just knowing the language. They react if things are not normal. (Teacher 2, Bomba secondary school, 20/09/2010)

Learners also applied self management skills by being resourceful. They pestered their parents to buy the required books; borrowed materials from friends; inquired about learning from other schools and on what to do in order to succeed. Commenting on resourcefulness, a focus group above average learner explained:

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIB

MALAWI COLLECTION

> We ask our friends what and how they study and try to befriend the successful ones in order to learn more on their learning habits. (Dowe secondary school, 26/07/2010)

The excerpts show that learners were always finding out about how best to learn and to succeed. Asking the below average learners if they found out about their learning, one of them said:

> *Pa za maphunzirozi, pali zinthu zina timafufuza nawo monga kujomba ndi khalidwe la aphunzitsi. Zambiri timangoyangana chifukwa alipo eni ake amene amazitsata ndipo ife timangomva zothaitha.* (Concerning our learning, there are some things in which we get involved to find out like the absence and the behaviour of our teacher. However, there are certain things which have responsible people who follow them and we just hear the outcomes). (Chombo CDSS 26/07/2010)

The statements by this below average learner show that such learners were not seriously involved in finding out about their learning. They failed to manage their learning in several instances. For example, a teacher reported a situation where some below average learners were entering the hall to write an English examination without knowing the subject of the examination. That is, whether it was an English composition, multiple choice or comprehension paper. This means that they did not prepare for the specific paper. The study found a strong relationship between the strategy of finding out about one's learning and performance because learners who always inquired about their learning performed much better than those who did not. This strategy was used more by the above average learners who succeeded in their learning. The below average looked not concerned much about their learning. The above statements suggest the need for training learners that learning begins with the learner himself or herself and they are required to take the responsibility for their own learning. Authorities cannot be aware of

all the hindrances of learning if not informed. They also need to be reminded frequently in order to take action. Knowing that learners have this responsibility on their learning, learning institutions should also learn to address learners' grievances with seriousness or apologise and explain clearly why they fail to honour their grievances to avoid riots and strikes by learners. For example, absenteeism, rudeness and laziness of teachers are some of the issues which can be resolved.

4.3.2.3 Setting goals and objectives

According to Table 7 above, 39 above average, and 13 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the above average learners used this strategy more frequently than the below average ones. Rubin and Wenden (1987) state that learners without aims are like boats without rudders and such learners do not know where they are going so they might not get there. The above average and the few below average reported that they set goals and objectives on how to study every evening and when to finish their assignments. They reported that all their goals of achieving the four language skills led to the main goals of passing examinations and achieving their careers. Commenting on setting goals an above average learner explained:

> *Kukhala ndi zolinga zoti ndikwaniritse zimakhala zikundikumbutsa zofunika kuchita pa chaka, pa* term, *pamulungu pa* day *komanso pa* hour. *Chifukwa chakuti popanda kukhoza* English *palibe MSCE* certificate *ndipo ndi chiyankhulo chofunika. Ndimayesetsa kukhala ndi zolinga zondithandiza kulimbikira kwambiri. Mwachitsanzo ndimakhala ndi zolinga zoti ndizikhala pakati pa* number *1 kapena 3 pa ntchito kapena mayeso ali wonse chaka chino. Ndikamakhoza ndimakhala ndi chidwi kukwaniritsa zolingazi. Ndikasankha zolinga zanga ndikulonjeza ena monga makolo, aphunzitsi ndi anzanga zimandithandiza kupewa zina zonse ndi kuzipereka. Ndi chifukwa chake ndimakhoza kwambiri.*

(Goal setting is a reminder of what I must do in a year, term, week, day or hour. English being a deciding subject for passing MSCE and official means of communication, I make sure I set goals that will make me work very hard. For example, I set the goal that in my class, I should always take positions one to three in every language skill and test in this school year. It keeps me motivated to achieve the goal. Choosing a goal and promising others like my parents, teacher or friends to do well lead me to a greater feeling of self control and commitment and therefore a better performance). (Focus group 1, Aliko secondary school, 19/08/2010)

The above statements conform that goal-setting is an important element of motivation and self-efficacy and encourages learner autonomy. For the below average learners, the few who said they set goals said they failed to achieve higher goals like taking high positions because they could not achieve them. Instead, their goal was to pass examination even with the lowest grade. One of the below average learners said:

Sitimalinga zambiri chifukwa sitingazikwanitse. Ife timangofuna kukhoza mayeso basi. Kukhoza ndi kukhoza, kaya ukhonza ndi 40% koma ukhala ndi pepala. Ife sitiphunzira ndi phuma ngati enawa koma potsiriza tonse ndi certificate *basi.* (We do not aim high because we cannot afford it. Our goal is to pass examinations. Passing is passing even if one passes with 40% but will still have the certificate. We do not panic when learning like these others but in the end we will all get a certificate). (Dowe CDSS, 20/09/2010)

Another below average learner said:

Ine sindikonda kukhala ndi zolinga kapena kulonjeza chifukwa palibe chimene ndingapindule. Lamulo langa ndi lakuti first things first. *Ndikatero ndimaona kuti zonse zikutha. Mwachitsanzo panopo sindingayambe kuganiza za mayeso pamene ma* homework *ali mbwee. Inetu ngakhale nditakhala ndi zolinga zotani kuti ndilimbikire ndimakhoza marks ake omweomweo basi. Chofunika apa ndichoti osamazipweteka ndi ntchito.*

(I don't like goal setting when learning because there is nothing I can achieve from that. My rule is doing first things first and I find myself doing things and finishing them. For example I cannot think of working for examinations when I have assignments to write. For me, no matter how I set my goals to work hard, in the end I get the same grade. The best way is not to overwork). (Chombo CDSS 18/09/2010)

The above statements show that the below average learners did not set high goals and others did not even have goals in their learning because of their continued under performance. They had no self-efficacy and lacked motivation leading to lack of focus. This promoted their low performance. Teachers reported that learners set goals especially the above average ones but many of the goals were kept by themselves. Learners who set high goals like going to the university to achieve a career were seen working extra hard and achieved their short term goals like studying schedules, practice and asking for assistance. One of the teachers reported:

Our learners set their goals in learning English but only few reveal them to us especially when counselling and guiding them in their career. We try to train them on the importance of goal setting during life skill teaching as a subject. Through learners' hardworking and seriousness we know they have goals to achieve. The below average also have goals but many of them are also below standard leading to low achievement. (Teacher 2, Bomba secondary school 2/10/2010)

The study found a strong relationship between setting goals and objectives and performance. The above average learners who set high goals and objectives to achieve worked hard to fulfil them leading to their success. The below average ones tried but with the loss of direction, they got confused and failed to perform well. This suggests that teachers should train their learners to work hard and aim high.

4.3.3 Evaluating one's learning

Evaluating one's learning means checking the outcomes of one's language learning against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy (Chamot, 1987). In conjunction with Table 7, 36 above average and 12 below average learners reported using this strategy. The study found that evaluating one's learning enhanced performance. The evaluation strategies which learners used and their relationship with performance have further been analysed and shown in Table 8 and discussion in the sections that follow.

Table 8: Evaluation as a meta-cognitive strategy

Evaluating one's learning	**Above average Learners out of 48**	**Below average Learners out of 48**
Self-monitoring	33	10
Self-evaluation	39	14

Table 8 above shows that learners used the sub-meta-cognitive strategies of evaluating their learning. Learners used the evaluation sets of self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Above average learners evaluated their learning much more than the below average ones. The study found a strong relationship between all evaluation sets of strategies and performance. These evaluation sets have further been discussed and analysed in the sections that follow.

4.3.3.1 Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring means checking, verifying and correcting one's comprehension or performance in the course of a language task (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Oxford (1990) defines it as the noticing and correcting of learners' own errors in any of the language skills.Table 8 shows that 33 above average and 10 below average learners reported using it. This could be because of lack of knowledge about the strategy. The learners reported that they noticed their errors in the four language skills and corrected them. As evidence of this statement, a below average learner explained:

> *Polankhula kapena polemba ndimakhala ndi kumvetsera mmutumu kuti ndikonze zolakwika.* For example *ndimaiwala kuti popereka moni masana ndimati* good morning *mmalo monena kuti* good afternoon. *Koma ukamaganiza umakonza pompo. Ndikakumbukira nditanena kale ndimayesetsa kuti ndisabwerezenso* mistake *imeneyo.* (I become attentive to myself so that when I notice a mistake I should correct it. For example when greeting my friends, in the afternoon I always say *good morning* instead of *good afternoon* but through monitoring I review it. Sometimes I realize a long time after speaking and I make sure that I do not repeat the same mistake). (Learner 2, Bomba secondary school, 3/10/2010)

The statements indicate that the few below average learners monitored their skills in language learning although lack of adequate practice strategies as previously stated hindered them. The only problem was lack of memory and knowledge of a number of grammar rules and vocabulary which made them fail to notice many errors when speaking and writing. The above average learners also reported that they monitored their language strictly. This agrees with Krashen's (1985) monitor hypothesis which states that before a learner produces an utterance, he or she internally scans it for errors and uses the learned system to make corrections. Commenting on self monitoring, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndimaona ndi kukonza pomwe ndalakwitsa polankhula, kulemba ndi zina zonse. Mwa chitsanzo pa* speaking *ndimakhala ndikuganiza za* grammar *monga ma* tense. *Ndikaona kuti ndalakwitsa chifukwa choiwala kapena kungophonyetsa ndimakonza pompo kapena nthawi ina. Polemba ma* composition *ndimaona zolakwa zanga pa* draft *ndipo ndimakonza polemba ya* final. *Izitu zimandithandiza kupeza marks okwera pa* composition. (I notice and correct my errors in all the four language skills. For example, when speaking, I think of the grammar rules like verb tenses and when I notice an error because of forgetting the right word or just a slip of the tongue, I correct instantly or later on my own. When writing compositions, I notice errors in my draft or before handing in my work and then correct them. This helps me to get higher marks in my compositions). (Learner 5 Aliko secondary school 2/10/2010)

However, Oxford (1990) states that learners should not become obsessed with correcting every speech difficulty because this would kill communication. The study found a strong relationship between self monitoring and performance because learners who reported that they self- monitored themselves during communication and after completing a task performed highly. Self-monitoring assisted them to think of using better strategies on given tasks in order to improve their performance. Commenting on the below average and performance, a teacher said:

> Learners use the monitoring strategy and it enhances performance especially in writing and reading comprehension which are examined. This works better with the above average learners who have enough knowledge of the language. Some below average learners monitor their language skills but it does not assist them to perform successfully because they lack the knowledge of the language and it results in monitoring incorrectly. (Teacher 1, Chombo secondary school, 11/10/2010)

From these statements, there is need to train learners to monitor their language or involve critical friends to assist them especially in reading and comprehension and writing. This can fulfil Vygotsky's theory which states that learning occurs in social groupings.

4.3.3.2 Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation means checking the outcomes of one's own language performance against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). With reference to Table 8, only 23 above average and 11 below average learners reported they used this strategy. Learners reported that they judged their overall execution of a task. Learners compared their grades with their friends' and analyzed what went wrong and what to do next in order to improve. For example, they improved their grades by studying harder. Commenting on evaluation of one's learning, an above average learner explained:

> *Pakutha pa* term *kapena tsiku, ndimakhala pansi kuganiza ma* strengths *ndi ma* weakness *ndi choti ndichite. Mwachitsanzo, ndimachita* compare marks *a* term *ino ndi yathayi komanso position. Kenako ndimachita* compare *ma* grades *a anzanga. Kenaka ndimaonanso ngati ndakwera kapena kutsika. Kenako ndimaganiza chifukwa chomwe ma*grades *anga atsika ndi choti ndichite. Ndimachita izi kuti ndilimbikire kwambiri ndikusiya makhalidwe olepheretsa monga kuchita* miss *makalasi, kusamvetsera ndi kusawerenga mokwanira.* (At the end of the day or term, I sit down to think of my strengths and weaknesses and what to do. For example, I compare my terminal grades and class position with the previous ones. I also compare the grades with my friends' then find out if I have improved or not. I sit down and think of the causes of my low grades and find solutions. This could be to work extra hard and stop behaviours which contribute to failure like missing classes, not paying attention and inadequate studying). (Learner 3, Bomba secondary school, 21/09/2010)

The below average learners also self-evaluated their learning in order to succeed. Out of 48 below average learners, 11 reported that they evaluated their learning and knew whether they were improving or not. Others said they did not because they always got a low grade.

Commenting on self evaluation, a below average learner explained:

> *Ndimaona mmene zinthu zikuyendera tikalandira mapepala a mayeso ndi za mkalasi. Ndikalandira* test paper *ndimatenga la mzanga ndikuchita* correction *kuti ndisadzalepherenso zomwezo.* (I self-evaluate my learning after tests or language activities. I receive the papers and borrow my friends' to make corrections so that I should not fail the same question again). (Aliko secondary school, 18/09/2010)

> *Ine sindichita stock za mmene maphunziro akuyendera chifukwa* marks *anga ndi omweo otsika pa* test *iri yonse. China nso ndi choti sitimadziwa kuti kuona mmene zinthu zikuyendera ndikofunika pa maphunziro.* (I do not evaluate my learning because I know it is always a low grade in every test. The other reason is that I did not know that evaluating is important in learning. (Chombo CDSS, 17/09/2010)

In the above quotations, the first learner said he evaluated his learning and acted by just copying a friend's right answers instead of being very active to understand the material during revision by the teacher. He also does not think of hard working as an important action. This shows that the learner evaluated his overall progress but did not care much of improving it. In the last statements, the learner said he did not evaluate his learning but knew where he was as a below average learner. This shows that many learners evaluated their learning though unconsciously. Learners lacked motivation and self-efficacy to improve. This led to failure in performance. All in all, the below average checked their overall outcomes on performance in the four language skills but because of persistent failure, they could not take proper action. The role of the teachers in such cases is to motivate this type of learners.

Finding out from teachers about self-evaluation, one of them said:

> Self-evaluation in all the four language skills help learners to identify specific areas where they need more support and can seek help from teachers or peers. To the above average learners, success breeds confidence. Self-evaluation encourages them to set higher goals and commit more effort to them to improve their performance.To the below average, evaluation is there but instead of breeding confidence, it breeds negative emotions leading to hating English lessons and teachers and laziness. This promotes their failure. (Teacher 2, Dowe CDSS, 13/08/2010)

The above excerpt shows that self-evaluation of one's learning followed by a positive action improved learners' performance.The below average learners just reported that they evaluated but did not act to change for improvement. All teachers suggested that learners self-valuated and improved their performance if tests and class work were given frequently. Teachers who tested their learners at the end of the term only hindered their learners from frequent evaluation and hard work to compete. From the above sentiments, learners need to be taught how to evaluate their learning and take action because many do not know that self-evaluation is an important language learning strategy. For self-evaluation to take place frequently, teachers should try to give daily exercises and frequent testing in all the four language skills and not ignoring compositions despite having large classes.

In summary of meta-cognitive strategies, it was revealed that learners used the meta-cognitive strategies of paying attention, planning and evaluating their learning. The study found a strong relationship between all the meta-cognitive strategies and performance.

4.4 Affective strategies used by learners

The study found that learners used affective strategies in order to learn English. The study found a weak relationship between all the affective strategies and performance. These are summarized in Table 9 and the following sections.

Table 9: Affective strategies used by learners

Affective Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Lowering one's anxiety	15	33
Taking one's emotional Temperature	31	30

With reference to Table 9, 15 above average and 33 below average learners used the affective strategy of lowering one's anxiety. Out of 96 learners, 31 above average and 30 below average learners used the strategy of taking one's emotional temperature. There were variations between the above and below average learners in the use of lowering one's anxiety as a strategy. The below average used it highly. There was also a nearly balanced use of the strategy of taking emotional temperature by the above and below average learners. The sub-affective strategies which learners used will further be discussed in the sections that follow.

4.4.1 Lowering one's anxiety

According to table 10, learners used lowering one's anxiety as an affective strategy.

It was highly used by the below average learners who reported:

> *Kuchita mantha ndi kuyankhula chizungu pagulu, kulephera kumva, mayeso, kutikonza polankhula chizungu pa gulu ndi kutifunsa mafunso amene sitidziwa mayankho ake kumatichititsa kukhala ndi nkhawa ndi mantha pophunzira.* (The fear of communicating orally, public speaking, non comprehension, tests, public error correction by teacher and frequent asking questions whose answers we do not know increase our anxiety). (Focus groups 1 and 2, Chombo CDSS 11/09/2010)

This quote is in line with Jarkovic (2008) who found out that the below average learners become more anxious and tensed-up when learning the language and that was why they used this strategy most. This was unlike the above averages learners who were free to learn without fear of being criticized or laughed at when using the language to participate. To lower their anxiety, learners reported that they used two sets of strategies. These were: knowing that they were not alone in their fears and beliefs and relaxing after classes. These are summarized in Table 10 and the following sections.

Table 10: Lowering anxiety as an effective strategy

Lowering anxiety Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Knowing that they were not alone in their fears	18	33
Relaxing after Classes	10	35

With reference to the Table 10 learners used the strategies of knowing that they were not alone in their fears and relaxing after classes in order to lower their anxiety. All these affective sets were highly used by the below average learners than above average

learners. The findings revealed a weak relationship between all the lowering anxiety strategies which learners used because most of the below average who used them failed in their performance. These sub-affective sets have been discussed further in the sections that follow.

4.4.1.1 Knowing that they were not alone in their fears

Learners reported that they reduced their anxiety by knowing that they were not alone in their fears and beliefs as a strategy. This strategy was reported by the learners but it has not been reported in the literature by different authors. Table 10 shows that out of 96 learners interviewed and observed 18 above average and 33 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the below average ones used it more than the above average ones. Teachers reported that the below average learners used this strategy more because they were the ones who had difficulties in English language learning. These difficulties made them have fears and become apprehensive when learning English and they resorted to this strategy to overcome their fears. This strategy helped them in that they did not bother even if friends laughed at them because of their being less knowledgeable. This caused them to have a relaxed classroom environment and increase their risk taking in different tasks. As evidence to this fact, below average learners at a focus group said:

> *Mantha ndi nkhawa pophunzira zimachepa tikadziwa kuti tonse mavuto athu ndi amodzi, aliyense ndi ophunzira. Izi zimatipangitsa kumasuka ndi kusangalala ngakhale timalephera mkalasi pongodziwa kuti vuto lathu ndi limodzi.*

(We lower our anxiety by merely knowing that we are all in the same boat. This makes us to relax and laugh with friends even if we fail to perform in the classroom. (Chombo CDSS, 7/08/2010)

These learners reported that knowing that they were not alone in their condition reduced their anxiety and led to the formation of well structured groups to discuss their condition. For example, they could discuss questions before a test. The above average learners who did not use this strategy much reported that they did not care because their aim was to make a difference by not being in the same situation of having fears. One above average learner said:

Ndimakonda kukhala omasuka ndi osaopa kanthu pophunzira English. *Ine ndine wosiyana ndi amene amachita mantha koma ndiri ngati amene amachita* aim high *kuti akhoze kwambiri.* (I like being a free person and I do not have fears when learning the language. I am not in the same situation with those who fear but with those who aim high to succeed). (Aliko secondary school 15/08/2010)

Another above average learner who used this strategy commented:

Timakhala wokondwa poona kuti tonse ndi chimodzimodzi koma tikafika pa zokhoza mkalasi timayesetsa kuti paoneke kusiyana polimbikira kwambiri. (*We* feel happy to see that we are not alone in our fears as learners but when it comes to performance, we strive to make a difference by competing through hard work). (Dowe Secondary School, 17/09/2010)

However, teachers reported that this strategy had a weak relationship with performance because it was the below average who used it most and still failed.

Concurring with this, a teacher explained:

> Sometimes learners' knowing that they were not alone failing in the classroom discouraged hardworking. It resulted into learners taking their failures lightly and labelling English as difficult. This also discouraged them to try harder. (Chombo secondary school, 27/08/2010)

From the above statements the above average learners did not use this strategy much because most of them reported that they did not fear to communicate orally, tests or public corrections. The below average ones used this strategy always but it did not help them to enhance their performance. Instead it affected them negatively by not working hard and not being concerned with their failure. This suggests that praising those who perform very well in class and announcing their grades could assist learners to know that all learners are not the same. This can encourage others to improve.

4.4.1.2 Using relaxation to lower their anxiety

Learners reported that they lowered their anxiety by relaxing after classes. With reference to Table 10, out of the 96 learners interviewed and observed, 10 above average and 35 below average learners used this strategy. As in many affective strategies, below average learners were rated highly in the use of relaxation as a strategy. Teachers reported that relaxing is good and easy and that was why lazy learners liked it. Learners joined school activities and religious societies in order to relax and lower their anxiety. These included listening to and singing hymns and playing different games like football and basket ball to stretch their muscles.

Commenting on the use of relaxing, both below and above average learners reported:

> *Timachepetsa nkhawa za kuphunzira pochita ma* exercise *monga mpira, kuimba ndi kuseka ndi anzathu.* (We lower our anxiety by relaxing through exercises like football, singing and laughing with friends). (Focus group 2, Dowe CDSS, 7/08/2009)

They also reported that they used laughter to relax by sharing jokes with friends. Answering on how they solved linguistic challenges, one below average learner explained.

> *Kukambirana ndi mzako vuto lako pophunzira English limapepuka. Mwachitsanzo ukalephera* test. (Talking it out with a friend about a language problem makes it half solved, for example one's poor performance during a test). (Chombo CDSS, 12/09/2010)

Learners reported that talking it out and joking helped to reduce uncomfortable feelings of nervousness and worries about their English language learning. Watching movies and drama during the weekends also helped them to laugh, relax and reduce their anxiety. They forgot their weaknesses in language a bit and then started a-fresh with vigour later. Commenting on relaxing as a way of lowering anxiety, a female teacher explained:

> Books say relaxing is a strategy for reducing anxiety but if overdone, it can lead to under performance. For example, learners keep phones with radios privately and these can make them lazy by just thinking of when a class will end so that they can go and relax by listening to music. Knowing the saying that "too much work with no play made Jack a dull boy", the school, organized relaxing time. For example, sports day and religious organization days where they relax by singing every week. But to say the truth, it does not mean that this can improve performance especially in our context. (Teacher, Aliko secondary school, 27/09/2010)

4.4.2 *Taking one's emotional temperature*

Taking ones emotional temperature means self-assessment involving getting in touch with feelings, attitudes and motivations through a variety of means (Oxford, 1990). With reference to Table 10, out of the 96 learners interviewed, 31 above average and 30 below average learners used this strategy. This shows that the strategy was highly used by all the learners. The below average used this strategy more highly compared to other non affective strategies. This was because they were the ones who were tensed up when learning the language from encountering a lot of difficulties and they just resorted to taking their emotional temperature. The strategies which learners used have been summarized in Table 11 and the following sections.

Table 11: Taking emotional temperature as an affective strategy

Taking one's emotional temperature as a strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Listening to one's body	28	33
Discussing feelings with someone else	34	27

To take their emotional temperature, learners used the strategies of listening to their body and discussing their feelings with someone else. Below average learners used listening to one's body more highly than the above average learners. There was only a slight difference in the use of discussing feelings with others as a strategy by both learners. The

study revealed a weak relationship between all the two sub-affective strategies and performance. These sub-strategies will further be discussed in the following sections.

4.4.2.1 *Listening to one's body*

Listening to one's body means paying attention to signals given by the body. The signals learners can pay attention to may be negative reflecting stress, tension, worry, fear and anger; or they may be positive indicating happiness, interest, calmness and pleasure (Oxford, 1990). Learners reported that they listened to their bodies by resting when they were sick, tired, stressed up, angered or tensed up. They also listened to their bodies when they were happy or interested. With reference to Table 11, out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 28 above average and 33 below average learners used this strategy. The numbers show great use of the strategy by below average learners. These were the ones who lagged behind in many strategies in the study. Teachers stated that the high use by the below average could be because of the difficulties they faced in language learning and laziness which caused them to listen to their bodies often. This concurs with Jarkovic (2008) who in his study found that the less proficient learners highly resorted to listening to their bodies as a strategy. In evidence of listening to their bodies, one above average learner said:

> *Ndimamvetsera thupi langa ndikamadwala mutu chifukwa chowerenga kwambiri. Ndimazipatsa nthawi yopuma kuwerenga. Sinditaya nthawi ndipo ndimayesetsa kumwa mankhwala.*(I listen to my body when I have a headache after studying for a long time, I give myself a bit of relaxation after short schedules of my studies. I do not take too long and I make sure I take some medicine). (Aliko secondary school, 3/10/2010)

Commenting on listening to their body, a below average learner also said:

> *Ndikasangalala kwambiri monga tikakhala pafupi kutsiriza* term *kuti tizipita ndimangoona ngati kutaya nthawi kuti ndzilowa mkalasi. Ndimalongezeratu pakangotsala milungu itatu. Ndikakhala kuti ndatopa kapena kukhumudwa ndimangonamizira kudwala kuti ndipume kulowa mkalasi.* (When I am too happy for example when the term has come to an end and we are about to go home, I just find it a waste of time to attend classes. I pack my things three weeks before closure. When I am tired or worried about something, I pretend to be sick, so that I can rest without attending classes). (Dowe secondary school, 1/10/2010)

With reference to the above statements, the above average learner used this strategy normally and it assisted him to resume work strongly. It also shows that the learner did not like being sick to relax. The below average used this strategy negatively in order to keep on relaxing. That was why the number of below average learners who listened to their bodies as a strategy rose up compared to the above average ones. All teachers reported that this strategy cannot be encouraged because many learners like relaxing. In evidence of this a teacher explained:

> Listening to the body is a good strategy because after attending to the requests of the body to rest one resumes learning with strength. Forcing the body to work does not work because you take time to do simple activities. However, this strategy is not emphasized because some learners especially the below average are lazy and take advantage of this strategy to over rest. This leads to their failure. (Teacher 1, Bomba secondary school, 2/10/2010)

As expressed by the teacher, the study found a weak relationship between listening to the body and performance because sometimes it was overdone.The above average learners who did not use it much preformed highly while the below average ones who used it frequently failed to perform well. Some learners always found small reasons to relax. The

below average ones used this most frequently because they accompanied it with laziness. The statements indicate that listening to one's body is a helpful and health promoting strategy. Teachers have the duty of knowing their learners' behaviours. There is also a need to advise learners on the importance of saying the truth because we have heard of learners being ignored while sick up to the point of death because of their' previous frequent lies in order to listen to their bodies.

4.4.2.2 Discussing feelings with someone else

Learners took their emotional temperature by discussing their feelings about language learning with their friends, teachers and others. Learners reported that language learning was not easy and they needed to discuss the challenges with others. Learners reported the challenges which triggered their emotions including teachers favouring others when teaching and marking tests; making unfair comparisons between learners and others; low marks earned and ill remarks from fellow learners among others. Learners improved their emotional temperature by discussing their language learning problems and what to do with friends. As evidence of this, an above average learner explained:

> *Ndinali okhumudwa chifukwa chomangolephera note making komanso ndi ma comments a aphunzitsi kuti ndiri* dull. *Ndinali pafupi kulira koma mzanga ananditonthoza kuti aphunzitsi amenewa ambiri amawadandaula koma njira yabwino ndi kuiwala ndi kuyamba kulimbikira. Mzangayu anandibwereka buku la ku library lofotokoza bwino* note-making *ndipo ndinayamba kumvetsa. Kuyambira pompo aphunzitsi aja anasanduka amzanga.(*I was very disappointed when I kept on failing note-making and the teacher's remarks in which she said I was dull. I nearly cried but my friend counselled me to say I was not the only one who complained about that teacher and the best way was to forget about her and work hard. She lent me a nice book from the library on note making and I improved. Since then the teacher turned to out to be my friend). (Bomba secondary school, 7/09/2010)

This statement shows that friends encouraged the learner to work hard leading to improved performance. This also achieves Vygotsky's theory concerning the Zone of Proximal Development which says learning becomes successful when the knowledgeable assist the less knowledgeable. Asking the below average how discussing feelings with others helped them a below average learner explained:

> Discussing feelings with friends is important *chifukwa pamalo pamakoma ndi anzako kuti azikuthandiza zochita.* For example, *mumakambirana za kukhosi komanso ngati wapalamula kuofesi.* (Discussing feelings with friends is important because they assist you on what to do. For example, you discuss private things and also when you have a case to answer at the office). (Learner 8, Aliko secondary school, 14/09/2010)

The statement by the below average learner shows that friends were not mainly there to help them in their language learning but for chatting and personal advice. This shows that the friends did not assist them to improve their performance. Asking teachers whether discussing feelings improved learners' performance, a teacher said:

> Sometimes discussing feelings helped especially to the above average who valued their learning most. To the below average who valued chatting and misbehaving, most of the times they discussed things which were not related to learning. (Teacher 1 Chombo secondary school 17/09/2010)

The above statement shows that the below average who used the strategy most did not use it for learning. This means although their worries were reduced, they could not perform highly. The study found a weak relationship between discussing learners feelings about language with others because not all discussions resulted in the learners improvement in learning. Out of 8 teachers, 6 reported that some learners counselled their friends and advised them to react negatively leading to more frustrations.

In summary, the study found that all affective strategies did not promote high performance. This is in line with Mullins (1992) who found a weak relationship between affective strategies and admission test scores. The above average learners that used them were successful because they mixed them with other strategies.

4.5 Social strategies used by learners

The study revealed that learners used social strategies in order to learn English. A strong relationship between one social strategy use and performance was found. The social strategies learners used will be discussed in reference to Table 12 and the following sections.

Table 12: Social strategies used by learners

Social Strategy	**Above average learners out of 48**	**Below average learners out of 48**
Asking questions	39	18
Cooperating with others	28	30

Table 12 shows the social strategies which above and below learners used. Learners used the sub-strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others. Out of the two, the study found a strong relationship between asking questions and performance. The social strategies learners used will be discussed in relation to Table 12.

4.5.1 Asking questions

Out of 96 learners interviewed and observed, 39 above average learners and 18 below average learners used this sub-social strategy. This shows that it was the above average learners who used this strategy more than the below average ones. The above average learners said that they asked more questions in order to understand and perform better. Commenting on the importance of questions on performance, an above average learner said:

> *Kufunsa aphunzitsi ndi anzathu kumatithandiza kuchita bwino pa mayeso chifukwa zinthu zomwe sitizimvetsa zimanveka akamatithandiza payekhapayekha.* (Asking questions to our teachers and fellow learners help us to perform better during examinations because issues which are not clear in class are also clarified during individual help). (Learner 4, Dowe CDSS, 17/09/2010)

Learners were observed asking the teacher and fellow learners what to do in the classroom. They always asked for clarification, repetition and verification. Commenting on the importance of asking, a below average learner explained:

> When we are not clear, we ask the teacher or friend to repeat, paraphrase, explain, slow down or give examples. This helps us to understand what we learn. (Focus group 1, Chombo CDSS 8/09/2010)

It was revealed that inadequate knowledge of English made below learners tense and not free to ask questions. They feared being laughed at by fellow learners. Lack of understanding also made the below average learners not to ask many questions. The other reason was that many of them were not actively following the lesson.

Interviewing the learners who were not asking questions, both above and below average learners explained:

> *Kukhala opanda mafunso ndiye kuti palibe vuto, zamveka. Koma nthawi zina timasiya osafunsa kuopa kusokoneza maplan ndi nthawi kwa aphunzitsi komanso kuopa kwataitsa nthawi amene akutsatira bwinobwino. Tikakhala ndi vuto lalikulu timangokaonana nawo aphunzitsi kapena anzathu patokha.*
> (Lack of questions means there is no problem with the language task. Sometimes we reserve some questions to avoid disturbing the teachers' time plans and wasting time for those who follow the lesson. We just opt for meeting the teacher or friends privately if it is a serious clarification). (Focus group 2, Aliko secondary school, 17/09/2010)

Finding out from teachers about asking of questions, a teacher explained:

> The above average learners ask questions to understand the content. Sometimes they know the content but they ask when they see that the teacher is not prepared or has gone astray somewhere. This encourages teachers to prepare their work thoroughly resulting into improvement of the learning process. The below average do not ask questions in the classroom much because of their language deficit and they are free to ask outside in Chichewa. Sometimes they do not ask because of lack of understanding. (Teacher 1, Chombo CDSS, 18/09/2010)

Interviewing and observing teachers and learners revealed that there was a strong relationship between asking questions and performance because those who asked questions got the right information leading to high performance. The knowledgeable assisted the less knowledgeable ones. This is in line with Vygotsky's constructivist theory [1896-1934] (1962) which states that learning occurs in social groupings and that those who are more knowledgeable tend to help the less knowledgeable ones to become knowledgeable through scaffolding process.

4.5.2 *Cooperating with others*

Cooperating means working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information or model a language activity (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). This involves cooperating with peers and proficient users of English. With reference to Table 12 the sub-strategy of cooperating with others was used by 28 above average and 30 below average learners. This shows that the below average used it more highly than the above average ones. Finding out from teachers why the below average learners preferred cooperative learning more than the above average ones, it was revealed that the below average learners were not active and relied on the above average to find answers for them. However, one below average learner said:

> *Kuphunzira pamodzi pagulu kumatithandiza kwambiri chifukwa timaphunzira zambiri kuchokera kwa anzathu. Timaphunzira ndi kuchita* practise *bwino kuposanso tikakhala ndi aphunzitsi.* (Learning together in groups helps us very much because we learn a lot from friends. We ask and practice English better with friends than the teacher). (Chombo CDSS, 19/09/2010)

Although Vygotsky (1962) stressed that learning occurs in a social grouping, the study found a weak relationship between cooperating with others and performance. This was evidenced from the below average learners who liked it most but failed to reach the satisfactory levels of performance because they failed to learn meaningfully. They performed better in team work because of the above average learners. On their own, they failed to retrieve what they learnt during tests and examinations because it was the above average learners who were doing the work for them. For example, in group compositions the below average learners lacked self-efficacy and left everything in the hands of the

MALAWI COLLECTION

above average ones to write. Commenting on cooperative learning, one of the above average learners said:

> *Ndimakonda kuphunzira kwa gulu pa* speaking, listening *ndi reading pang'ono. Sindikonda kulemba kwa gulu pa ntchito yoti aphunzitsi akachonge monga note making ndi composition chifukwa ndimangolemba ndekha kapena awiri basi. Ena salemba nawo kapena kumvetsera. Amangofuna kulandira* marks *aulere. Nthawi zina gulu lathu limalephera chifukwa chosathadizana ndi kugwirizana.* (I like cooperative learning in speaking listening and partly reading. I do not like team writing on work which will be graded by the teacher especially note making and compositions because it is mostly done by one or two of us. The rest do not get involved to do the exercise or even to learn. Others like to get a free grade. Sometimes our group fails because of lack of effort to work together). (Dowe CDSS, 17/09/2010)

It was revealed that cooperative learning worked better in schools which had learners who were selected on merit than those schools whose learners just found places after failing the national examinations. This was because those selected on merit shared ideas and the knowledgeable assisted those who failed and less knowledgeable. In schools where learners who did not do very well were selected to (CDSSs), very few were knowledgeable to assist others. For example, in some groups, it was observed that no one was knowledgeable enough to assist others. This resulted into learners hating participatory learning and not being motivated to learn English. Because of the history of learner's examination failure at a particular school, many below average learners thought they failed because of the school they were at. In evidence of this, one teacher reported that their school (Chombo CDSS) was nicknamed *Nangantani* (what shall I do?) because it was only those parents who had no money for private schools who sent their learners at this school. This gave a chance to those who failed the national examinations to get

places in such schools resulting into an increase in the number of below average learners. Learners admitted to such schools lacked the motivation that they were going to succeed learning from the history of the school. Many groups could not assist each other because all were not knowledgeable. In the few groups with some knowledgeable learners, they were the ones who dominated and the other members were not active. The others were passive because the content was not of their level and they found it too difficult for them. Out of eight teachers, five reported that in schools with large classes, lack of resources and many below average learners, cooperative learning failed to achieve its goal. Samida (2004) states that co-operation with others eliminates competition and in its place brings group spirit. However, it was reported by teachers that most of the above average learners did not like cooperative learning because in the target schools there was a strong emphasis on competition. This is also in line with Jurkovic (2008) who found that learners who are successful rarely value cooperative learning. Commenting on cooperating with others, a teacher argued:

> The above average practice cooperative learning because they want to obey; it is one of the demands of the curriculum and because of the shortage of resources. They feel like being delayed to work in teams because they do not benefit anything from the below average who depend on them to perform without understanding. (Chombo secondary school, 15/09/2010)

Limited autonomy by the below average learners meant a lot of dependence from the teacher and peers. For example, during observation at Dowe secondary school, a learner who failed to answer a question was simultaneously given the correct answer in a whisper by a friend. In this case, it showed that cooperation impeded the below average learners from involving their mental processes seriously. Finally, the study found a weak

relationship between cooperating with others and performance because the below average ones who liked it most failed. Large classes, high number of incompetent learners, inadequate supervision from teachers among others made cooperative learning not to achieve its goals.

In summary of social strategies, the study found that learners used the social strategies of asking questions and cooperating with others. It was revealed that asking questions as a strategy enhanced performance. Cooperating with others failed to enhance performance because of the high number of below average learners in CDSSs, high competition among learners and large classes. Teachers have the duty of varying teaching methods to suit all learners' performance. Individual exercises should also be given after groups to make all learners involved.

4.6 Chapter summary

The chapter has analysed and discussed data that was sourced from secondary school teachers of English and form three learners. It has reported that English learners used language learning strategies of cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies and that there is a relationship between language strategy use and performance. The above average learners scored highly in the use of cognitive, meta-cognitive and asking questions as a social strategy. The below average learners used compensation, affective and cooperative strategies highly. The study found that all meta-cognitive strategies and cognitive strategies of practising, reviewing work done, note taking and summary and the social strategy of asking questions were highly related to

performance. Finally, it was also found that all compensation strategies, cognitive strategies of highlighting and rote memorisation and the social strategy of cooperating with others did not enhance high performance.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Chapter overview

The study investigated the language learning strategies used by learners and how they affected their performance. The key data sources were form three English language teachers and learners. The study involved learners and English teachers in four secondary schools in Zomba Urban. The study used constructivism and mainly the information processing model as a theoretical frame work.

The study was mainly responding to three research questions. These were about the language learning strategies used by learners, how they were used and how the strategies used affected their performance. These questions were answered in Chapter 4 through a comparison of above and below average learners' continuous assessment scores, performance during observation and the language learning strategies they used. This chapter presents the conclusions raised from the findings and makes recommendations which can assist in the teaching and learning of English in schools. Finally, it suggests the areas for further studies.

5.1 Key issues

The study found that many learners had difficulties in acquiring the necessary competences in English as a subject. This agrees with Mmela (2006) who also found that

learners had difficulties in learning English as a second language and many performed poorly. Although various studies have attributed the poor performance to a number of factors, the findings of this study illustrate that the problem also originated from how the learners go about learning, the efforts they put in or in other words, their use of language learning strategies affected their performance.

In response to the first and second research questions, both above and below average learners used cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, social and affective strategies. The study established that above average learners used special sub-strategies most and in an orchestrated manner. It means these strategies, for example, practising and management of study time were very important for learning and could be taught to the below average learners who thrived within the same contextual challenges with the above average but performed poorly. It also means that the difference between the above and below average students was how they managed their time. Many learners failed to be organised all along their education. They performed poorly or less than they could because they started being organised when examinations were near. Difficulty of the material to those who joined the secondary school level without passing well in the national examinations; procrastination and laziness hindered the below average learners from using cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. These were found highly related to performance. They mostly used the language learning strategies which had a weak relationship with performance. For example they used the strategies of relaxing and rote memorization. This means below average learners shunned strategies which highly involved their mental processes and managing their learning which are the most

important strategies in learning. In this study, the findings also mean that large classes, lack of proper planning, organization and supervision by teachers and strong emphasis on competition made cooperative learning which is a social strategy fail to achieve its goal of the knowledgeable assisting the less knowledgeable. This is not in line with constructivism which guides this study. The findings also illustrate that teachers used cooperative learning mainly to solve the problem of inadequate resources and to reduce their work especially during the marking of compositions. Some were not very much concerned about whether learning was taking place or not.

The results also meant that examinations posed obstacles when trying to integrate active learning or learner centred pedagogies into the classroom because more often than not these pedagogies which made learners practice different language learning strategies were seen as ineffective in preparing learners for passing examinations. Passing examinations was the priority for most learners and teachers. It was also found that because of the interest in passing examinations and not in learning, some above and below average learners and even teachers did not put a lot of effort on speaking and listening skills because they were not examined. They could not understand that these skills could indirectly help them pass examinations. The findings mean that most of the learners did not like speaking English. The status of English speaking was very poor. Some teachers also did not like speaking English to their learners as role models. Although some schools tried to force learners to communicate in English, only few mainly those with English speaking backgrounds spoke English satisfactorily.

In response to the third research question, the study established that there was a relationship between the strategies learners used; how they used them and their performance. The use of language learning strategies contributed to the difference between above and below average learners. This concurs with Fewell (2010) who by comparing high and low proficiency learners found that language learning strategies as a variable is a significant determinant of eventual success or failure in language learning. There was a causal reciprocal relationship between strategy use and language performance which indicates that strategy use and language performance are both causes and outcomes of each other. The study has revealed that improper use of language learning strategies is another cause of poor performance among English learners.

5.2 Recommendations

Language learning strategies are very important to learners because they help learners who use them meaningfully to become autonomous and communicatively competent. In view of this, this study makes the following recommendations:

- Teacher training institutions and teachers should reinforce language learning strategy training. There is need for teachers to understand what language learning strategies are how to train learners and which variables affect LLS choice and use. Learners should be trained on language learning strategies beginning at primary school in order to have a good background of how to learn which can result in boosting their performance.

- The Malawi government in conjunction with the Malawi National Examinations Board should consider introducing examinations which should be testing English in all the four language skills including listening and speaking as it was done in French language. This could encourage learners and English language teachers to take speaking and listening more seriously. This could also lead to our learners being more fluent in English.

- Education authorities should provide an enabling environment to facilitate the learning of English. Examples of the enabling environment could be resources and teacher to pupil ratio reduction. This could assist learners to use learner-centred teaching methods easily. These methods help learners to use different language learning strategies.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

- A comparative study on language learning strategies with the rural secondary schools could be carried out for comparison purposes.

- Detailed studies could also be carried out to study few language learning strategies and how they relate to performance at national level in order to come up with results which could be generalised.

REFERENCES

Abraham, R., & Van, R. (1990). Strategies of successful language learners. *TESOL Quarterly, 24(2), 223-234.*

Aijaz, M.S. (2001). *Learning achievement in primary schools of Pakistan: A quest for quality education.* Islamabad: UNESCO.

Arher, J.M., Holy, M.L., & Kasten, M.M. (2001). *Action research for teachers: Travelling the yellow brick road.* Columbus: Prentice Hall

Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your research project: A guide for first time researchers in education and social science* (2nd ed). Buckingham: Open University.

Bogdan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (1988).*Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed). Boston: Allen and Bacon Publishers.

Borg, W.R., & Gall, M.D. (1989). *Education research: An introduction* (5thed.). New York: Longman.

British Council, (1978). *Individualisation in language learning.* London: ETIC Publications.

Brooks, J., & Brooks, M. (1993). *In Search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms.* Alexandra: ASCD.

Cajkler, W., & Adelman, R. (2000). *The practice of foreign language teaching* (2nd ed.). London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Chagunda, A. (2000, August 12-18).Generation. *Malawi news,* 43 (2487), 4

Chamot, A.U. (2003). Issues in language learning strategy research and teaching. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 2004; 1,* (1): 14-26.

Chamot, A., & O'Malley, M. (1994). *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach.* Retrieved at auchamot @ gwu .edu on 15/02/2010.

Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). (Ed). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Chimombo, J.P.G. (2005). Quality versus quantity in education: Case studies in Malawi. *Journal of International review of education (2005)*; 51: 155- 172.

Chimombo, J. Kunje, D. Chimuzu, T., & Mchikoma, C. (2005). *A study conditions of schooling and quality of education in Malawi.* Zomba: The SACMEQ 11 Project in Malawi.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge Falmer.

Cohen, A.D. (1996). Second language learning and use of strategies: Clarifying issues. Minnesota: Minneapolis. Retrieved on 21/09/2011 at www.carla.umn.edu/strategies/resources/ sbiclarify.

Commonwealth Education Fund Strategic Plan for Malawi (2003-2005). Retrieved on 09/7/2009 at http://www.commonwealth education fund.org.

Cresswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research methods*. Oxford: How to Books Ltd.

Department of Research Evaluation & Policy studies Report (2009). *Baseline study on learning achievement of standard 3 and 7 learners in Malawi.* MIE: Domasi.

Diener, E., & Crandal, R. (1978). *Ethics in social and behavioural research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dzama, E.N. (2006). *Malawi secondary school learners' learning of science: Historical background, performance and beliefs.* (Unpublished PhD Thesis) Department of Education, University of Western Cape.

Ehrman, M., & Oxford, R.L. (1990). Adult language learning styles and strategies in an intensive training setting. *Modern language journal*; 74: 311-327.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford university press.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1985). *Strategies in inter-language communication.* New York: Longman Group Ltd.

Fewell, N. (2010). Language learning strategies and English language proficiency: An investigation of Japanese EFL university learners.*TESOL Journal, 159 (2), 159-174.*

Fidderholdt, (1998). Retrieved on19/01/10 from URL : http: // www.*Jalteducation.*

Frankiel, J.R., &Wallen, N.E. (2008). *How to design and evaluate research in education (7th ed).* New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Friends of Malawi, (2004). *Building ties between Malawi and America, one village at a time: Education.* Retrieved on14/04/2011 fromD:/friends of Malawi; About Malawian geography.mht

Harvey, P. (1985). A lesson to be learnt: Chinese approaches to language learning. *ELT Journal,39(3),* 183-186.

Jurkovic, V. (2008). *Language learner strategies and language competence: A case study in the Slovene Higher Education area.* (Unpublished doctoraldissertation). Ljubljana: Filozofska Fakulteta.

Kalong, R.A. (2008). *Code- switching.* Retrieved on 20/01/2012 at www.fp.utm.../pdf fail/...rebeccaidaApc040264D2008ttpS

Kholowa, F.A.C. (1999). *Between two worlds: Conflict between Malawi teachers' pedagogic paradigm and assessment needs of their context: How do they resolve*

it? (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of East Anglia.

Kishindo, E., Susuwele, W., Ndalama, L.,& Mwale, L.(2005).*Assessing learner achievement in English, Chichewa, mathematics and science in standards 3,5, and 7 in Malawian primary schools.* Domasi: Malawi.

Krashen, S.D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications.* New York: Longman.

Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd.

Lee, C.K. (2010). An overleaf of language learning strategies. *ERECLS,* 7, 132-152.

Lipenga, M. (2011). *Exploring the teaching methods and strategies that are used in primary schools for the development of language proficiency.* (Unpublished MEd dissertation). Zomba: University of Malawi.

Livingston, L. (1997). *Meta-cognition: An overview*. Retrieved on 10/09/2011 from http://www,gse.buffalo.edu/fus/shuel/cep564/metacog.htm.

Llurda, E. (2011). On competence, proficiency and communicative language ability. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 10(1), 2000 –85.

Magogwe, J., & Oliver, R. (2007). The Relationship between language learning: Botswana system. *An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied linguistics, 35, 338-352.*

Malawi Institute of Education, (2002). *Senior secondary school English Syllabus.* Zomba: Domasi.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Matiki, A. (2001). The Social Significance of English in Malawi. *World Englishes,* 20 (2), 201-218.

Mayer, R.E. (2004). "Should there be a three strikes rule against pure discovery learning?" *American psychologist 59 (1), 14-19.*

McKeachy, W.J. (1988). *The need for study strategy training.* Houghton: Mifflin company.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Case study research in deduction: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco CA: Jossey- Bass

Miller, G.A. (2003).The cognitive revolution: A historical perspective: *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 7, 141-145.

Miller, G.A. (1956). *The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information.* Retrieved on 11/09/2011 at http://www.well.com/user/smalin/miller.html

Mmela, E. (2006). *Implementing integrated literacy approaches in an English classroom in Malawi.*(Doctoral Thesis Presented to Polytechnic Institution 2006). Retrieved on 29/04/2012 at http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/mmelapdf.

MoEST, (2008). *National education sector Virginia plan (2008-2011)*. Lilongwe: Malawi.

Mullins, P. (1992). Successful English language learning strategies of students enrolled at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkom University, Bankok.Thailand: *Dissertation Abstracts International, 53 (6), 1829 A (UMI 9233758).*

Ngwira, N. (2010). An investigation of learning strategies in learning school biology. (Unpublished Master of Educationdissertation). Zomba: University of Malawi.

Nisbet, J., & Shucksmith, J. (1986). *Learningstrategies.* London: Routledge & Kegan Publications.

O'Malley, M., & Chamot, A.U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.* Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Ozel, A. (2009). The practice of information processing model in teaching of cognitive strategies. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, March 2009.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Presidential Committee on Quality Education (2000). *Quality of education final draft.* Lilongwe: Malawi.

Radwan, A.A. (2011). Effects of L2 proficiency and gender on choice of language learning strategies by university learners majoring in English. *Asian EFL Journal.* Retrieved on 14/09/2011 at http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/pdf/march-2011-aar.pdf.

Rossman, G.B., & Rallis, S.F. (2003). *Learning in the fields: Introduction to qualitative research.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Samida, D.K. (2004). *Language learning strategies.* Retrieved on 14/12/2011 at libro.do-bunkyodal.ac.jp/research/pdf/treatises05/01samidaa.pd.

Shmais, W.A. (2003). Language learning strategy use in Palestine. *TESL-EJ, 7(2), 1-17.*

Stern, H.H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, H.H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarone, E. (1977). Conscious communication strategies in inter-language: A progress report. *Tesol, 77,194-203.*

UNESCO. (2000).*The Dakar framework for action, education for all: Meeting our collective commitments.* Adopted by the World Education Forum Dakar, Senegal, 26-27 April, 2000 including six regional frameworks for action. France: UNESCO.

Vermont, H.D. (1996). Meta-cognitive, cognitive and affective aspects of learning styles and strategies: a phenomenological analysis. *Higher Education*, 31, (pp 25-50).Retrieved on 21 August2011from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447707.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press, retrieved on 10/03/2010 from http://.tip.psychology .html.

Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (1987). (Eds). *Learner strategies in language learning.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice- Hall International.

Wisker, G. (2008). *The post graduate Research Handbook.* (2nd ed). Basingstoke: Pal grave Macmillan.

Ya- ling –Wu, (2008). Language learning strategies used by students at different proficiency levels. *Asian EFL Journal.* Retrieved on 10/03/2012 from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com Dec._08_yhw.php

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide for learners

1. What are your favourite subjects?

2. Which areas of English do you face a lot of challenges in?

3. Why is English an important subject to learn?

4. English being so important in Malawi, What do you do to overcome the problems you face in English?

- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading and comprehension
- vocabulary
- grammar

5. What do you do to show that you are responsible for your learning in and outside theclassroom?

6. You have mentioned different strategies you use to improve your performance in English. How does each of these help you?

7. How do the following affect the strategies you apply?

- Teacher
- your learning styles
- national examinations,
- experience
- motivation
- curriculum

8. How do you modify and increase your learning strategies?

9. How do teachers help in training you on how to learn the different language skills?

10. How do you plan and evaluate your language learning?How do these steps assist you?

11. Can you mention the strategies you use which do not foster language learning ?

12. Which interaction strategies foster or hinder good language learning strategies?

13. Do you set goals to solve your linguistic problems? If so give examples?

14. Which strategies make you become a successful learner?

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for teachers

1. What is the status quo of your learners' performance in English
2. Do you know some language learning strategies?
3. If yes, which ones do you know?
4. How did you know about these?
5. How do you integrate these language learning strategies in your teaching?
6. What language learning strategies do learners use in order to learn
   a. Listening
   b. Reading
   c .Speaking
   d. Writing
7. Which ones foster learning and which ones do not?
8. How do you help learners to acquire the right learning strategies?
9. How do learners take responsibility of their own learning?
10. What do you do to encourage autonomous learning?
11. What steps do you take to help the poor English language learners know how to learn?
12. What challenges do you face in training the learner how to use better language learning strategies

APPENDIX 3: Interview with Dowe CDSS teacher 2, on 06/09/2010

Researcher: How are you sir?

Teacher: I am fine and how are you?

Researcher: I am fine.

Researcher: First I should thank you for accepting to be interviewed. As I have already stated, feel free because everything will be confidential.

Researcher: What is the status quo of your learners' performance in English?

Respondent: Learners have difficulties to acquire the necessary competencies.

Researcher: What evidence do you have to show these difficulties?

Respondent: Today's learners are different from our time. Most of them fail to speak and write English and their compositions are disappointing.

Researcher: Do you know some language learning strategies?

Respondent: Yes I do remember some.

Researcher: Which ones do you remember?

Respondent: I remember Grammar Translation and Suggestopedia

Researcher: Yes, but these are the ones we teachers use to teach.

Researcher: As from the name Learning Strategies they are those steps learners use to learn. In other words, they are the steps learners take in order to learn a language.

Researcher: Can you give an example of what your learners do in order to perform well in English?

Respondent: Studying, being attentive, practising

Researcher: Yes these are what are in other's words called Language Learning Strategies others could be planning, making notes and guessing intelligently. Do yougive room for learners to use these strategies in your teaching?

Respondent: Yes but not quiet

Researcher: How?

Respondent: During teaching, attention is a must and all become attentive. This means it is there and very few disturb. Practising is there but not very successful because of the large number of learners – 100. Studying is there but they do not utilise it. We have a prep. period but they just make noise. It means the chance is given but learners fail to use it. As for guessing intelligently, we give them the chance during comprehension but many fail.

Researcher: What learning language strategies do learners use in order to learn?Or in other words what do learners do in order to learn the following language skills.

LISTENING

Respondent: They pay much attention and high concentration. When they have notunderstood, they ask for clarification immediately. They give feedback like nodding, head movement, facial gesture and eye contact. If you move to another place you move together by their eyes following. Others scribble short notes using skimming and scanning.

Researcher: Do their performance prove this serious listening?

Respondent: Only for the few. Others look attentive because they fear being punished and they just look as we are together. When it comes to questions, such learners fail. For example, those who are below average learners.

SPEAKING

Researcher: What do your learners do inorder to be good speakers?

Respondent: They are required to practice speaking but here the practice is minimal.

Researcher: Why do you think it is minimal?

Respondent: It is becauselearners are not exposed to English language speaking practice at an early age, for example, at nursery school and primary school. The other reason is that there is no enough time to practice speaking in the classroom with the large number of learners and the need to prepare them for examinations. Learners fail to speak because they are

shy and fear to make mistakes. The above average try and we do not over emphasize on their mistakes but we encourage them.

Researcher: Are those the only reasons why learners fail to practice English speaking?

Respondent: The other reason is that we teachers sometimes have a deficiency in English speaking.Fewcommunicate to the learners in English and mostly the English language teachers.

Researcher: Faced with this lack of practice what do you advice the learners do in order to keep on trying?

Respondent: We advice them that English is a Joker. They cannot pass without passing it.

Researcher: During speaking what do the learners do inorder to keep on trying?

Respondent: Some speak simple English and use simple English words. Others code switch where they see that they cannot continue. Others speak slowly so that they think and correct their language during their speaking. Others use gestures or rehearse what they are going to say. Many learners do not try but shun English speaking. For example, the belowaveragelearners fear going to the staff room because of their English deficiency.

WRITING

Researcher: What do learners do in order to be good writers?

Respondent: Learners practice writing. After imparting various writing skills like short story writing, the clever learners are on the fore front to practice.Others improve their writing by wide reading of materials like books, novels, newspapers. They do this to learn how the renowned writers write their work. The above average learners also use creativity and imagination. Others assist each other in groups. Some bring their work to their teachers, to correct them.

Researcher: You have only mentioned about the above average learners what about the below average?

Respondent: They also do the same but slowly and in a disorganised way.

Researcher: Can you explain clearly what the below average do inorder to learn writing skills.

Respondent: They practice writing but they produce poor work. They rely on others to get exercises right. They rarely work out on their own but like copying other people's ideas. They do not practice wide reading. Instead they read seriously or memorise when they hear about examinations. They fail to be creative and imaginative. Others do not hand in assignments.

Researcher: What do you do to encourage the below average to hand in their work?

Respondent: Some teachers punish them but with the size of the classes as you have seen, we do not make follow ups because it turns out to be a relief on the part of marking. We just make sure that the work is revised and they copy the right answers.

READING

Researcher: What do learners do in order to be good at reading?

Respondent: Learners survey, question, read, revise and recite (SQR3R method) a piece of readingbutsometimesit depends on the type of reading. When studying or reading an academic novel, they take notes and summaries of the text in order to understand and remember easily. After that they go to the answering questions related to the reading. It can be set questions according to the sub-topics or past test or examination papers. After that they evaluate their understanding and then go back to revise then recite.

Researcher: What do the learners do if it is a comprehension passage?

Respondent In every type of reading, learners' minds are active throughout. They cannot understand without concentration. When reading a passage, they apply a psycholinguistic process. That is to say they become active by bringing in their experience of the world in which they live to the story.

Researcher: Can you explain with an example on how they bring in these experiences?

Respondent: Readers think along with the writer. For example, we were reading a passage on early marriages. The learners liked the passage because they could easily relate to what happens in their society. They could ask themselves why thecharacters were behaving like that, what they could do if they were a character and if it was really practical.

Researcher: Are those the only strategies learners use during reading?

Respondent: As already said learners survey the passage, go to the questions section, read attentively then go back to answer the questions. In addition, learners

are able to analyse and evaluate events as a high order of bloom's taxonomy. They are also able to infer meanings of difficult words and imply from the context.

Researcher: I have seen that learners use different strategies inorder to perform successfully in English. You have told me that learners think, practice, take notes, memorise,code-switch, guess intelligently, shun communication, speak slowly, plan, pay attention, work together, ask questions, summarise and evaluate. I would like to know which ones of the language learning strategies aboveenhance performance and which ones do not and why. I will be asking you strategy by strategy.

Researcher: You said learners practice the four language skills. Does practiceenhance their performance?

Respondent: Practice enhances performance because the learners who practice and learn by doing perform highly. For example, practice in writing makes them have more knowledge and promote memory.

Researcher: What about note- taking and summarising

Respondent: Note taking and summarising enhances performance but only fewlearners know how to take notes and summaries. Many learners have problems to make notes and summaries but those who are intelligent know how to make them and are the successful.

Researcher: Does rote memorization enhance performance?

Respondent: Rote memorization enhances temporary performance.

Things which cannot be remembered through studying with understanding are memorized for the sake of the examinations and they forget them soonafter the examination.

Respondent: Can you give examples of such things? Which should be memorised?

Respondent: Learners increase their performance memorizing long lists and confusing grammar, for example, the order of adjectives in a noun phrase phrasal verbs and prepositions.

Researcher: Can we say rote memorization is the right strategy of learning?

Respondent: No, learners need to understand the material. This is done through working hard all the time. This strategy only helps when the learners especially the below average are stranded and examinations are near.

Researcher: Does it enhance high performance?

Respondent: No to those who rely on it but yes when accompanied with other strategies and if it is done only on confusing material.

Researcher: Does code-switching enhance performance?

Respondent: No

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because it is done during speaking which is not examined inMalawi.

Researcher: What about guessing intelligently as a strategy?

Respondent: Our learners fail to guess intelligently but they always guess wrongly.It can enhance learning because learners can understand the meaning of a passage or a speech through intelligent guessing of difficult word. At this school this strategy does not help them.

Researcher: You said some shun communication; does this behaviour enhanceperformance?

Respondent: No, because it hinders participation and learners learn better bydoing.

Researcher: Does speaking slowly enhance performance?

Respondent: No.

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because speaking is not examinable in Malawi.

Researcher: Does planning enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes. Planning their work helps them to be organised and getfocused. As learners advance, they are faced with a lot of work and without planning they lose focus.

Researcher: Does paying attention have a relationship with performance?

Respondent: Yes, because it is the first step in learning. If the material is received wrongly, the learner will not perform successfully.

Researcher: What about working together in groups?

Respondent: Itenhances performance when learners assist each other with understanding. In our case, most of our learners do not take these groups seriously. They copy from the knowledgeable without understanding. They do not participate. It does not enhance performance because it becomes a period of personal interactions especially to the below average. This normally happens because of the shortage of books and the size of the groups.

Researcher: What about asking questions, do they enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes, learners ask teachers and friend for clarification on what they did not understand. It is also a sign that learners had been following the lesson.

Researcher: Do learner's attitudes, feelings and emotions and values have any relationship with their performance?

Respondent: No, because such things are not examinable.

Researcher: If these attitudes, feelings and emotions are negative can their performance not get affected?

Respondent: Learners who are focused are not really affected. They can slightly affect their learning but not performance because they are not examinable. It is mainly the below average who feel tense when learning because they lack knowledge of the language. It slightly affects learning but we always counsel our learners.

Researcher: You said learners evaluate their learning does this help in improving their performance?

Respondent: Not really. Few compare their grades with the previous and adjust their efforts to improve. Others set goals to achieve in the next term, for example, to improve their position.

Researcher: Does evaluation enhance performance?

Respondent: Yes, to the few who use it because it encourages hardworking.

Researcher: We have exhausted the strategies which learners use but are there other actions on how learners take responsibility of their learning?

Respondent: They take responsibility of their own learning by being resourceful to urge their parents to buy them some books, photocopy important notes or borrow from friends. They also have the responsibility to make sure other fellow learners do not disturb them. They report to the authorities about those who make noise and teachers punish them.

Researcher: We have come to the end of the interview. But before we close, do you have any other comments or questions to ask?

Respondent: I do not have much to say only that these strategies can be integrated easily in our teaching if the Ministry can provide us with enough materials, teachers and motivating infrustructure. We fail to encourage these strategies because of shortage of books, large classes and our learners are not motivated to learn in dilapidated classrooms because of this some learners already have the mentality that they are at an institution where they cannot succeed. This lack of motivation hinders them from using the required strategies seriously.

Researcher: Thank you very much for your wonderful contribution.

Respondent: You are welcome Madam.

APPENDIX 4: Focus group discussion questions

1. Why is English an important subject to learn?
2. English being so motivating to learn, what do you do in order to be successful in

   a- speaking b- listening c- reading d-writing
3. In each language skill above, why do you use those strategies?
4. Among all the reasons for learners performing poorly in English, how do you as learners contribute to this poor performance?
6. How does learning by doing help you to be successful?
7. What challenges do you face in order to master the four language skills and how do you solve them?
8. Do you set goals to achieve during learning? If yes, give examples.
9. What do you do to remember what you learn?
10. How does socialising with teachers and friends improve your learning?
11. Do having poor relationships with classmates and teachers have any effect?
12. How do you make sure there is good relationship with teachers and classmates?
13. Do you plan your language learning? If yes, how?
14. How do you evaluate your learning?
16. What contextual challenges limit you in the use of some language learning strategies?
17. How do the external examinations, curriculum load and class size and teachers affect your choice of language learning strategies?

APPENDIX 5: Observation schedule

Date: ..... School: .....

Class: ..... Time: .....

Language skill observed within the lesson and strategies used:

Reading:

Listening:

Speaking:

Writing:

Other observations:

1. Learners' ability to remember and relate previous information
2. Interactions:
   a. Learner to learner
   b. Learner to teacher
3. Learners' emotions,attitudesand feelings for learning
4. Teacher's influence of some strategies
5. Learner involvement and motivation
6. The use of compensation strategies to overcome language limitations when speaking or writing
7. Self management strategies observed
8. Cognitive strategies observed (suchas practising,analysing, and reasoning, receiving and sending messages, taking notes and summarising).
9. Other behaviours by teachers and learners observed influencing the use of some strategies.

APPENDIX 6: A sample of learners' progress report (surnames removed for anonymity)

FORM 3, TERM 1, 2010

NAME	MID TERM1 %	TERMINAL TEST PAPER 1 %	TERMINAL TEST PAPER 2 %
Alinafe	60	61	58
Anne	49	55	51
Anne	22	31	36
Agness	47	51	52
Alinafe	39	32	35
Brenda	56	60	58
Brian	65	70	66
Catherine	68	66	65
Comfort	56	51	49
Calorine	30	33	22
Chiyanjano	58	60	46
Chifundo	49	51	52
Chimango	61	52	50
Cosmas	23	36	39
Chikondi	50	49	55
Dyna	31	35	22
Dorothy	30	41	45
Esther	15	26	19
Esnart	48	-	-
Fatsileni	38	39	26
Fulkani	31	32	30
Florence	69	66	67
Gelard	52	50	44
Gosanaiti	41	48	40
Hetherwick	66	72	69
Innocent	52	60	51
Joseph	21	11	16
Justice	38	39	40
John	40	44	52
Khama	-	30	45
Lawrence	60	65	58
Morine	55	-	60
Misheki	23	16	25
Mwadida	50	49	-
Manuel	51	30	33

Modesta	16	-	-
Mayamiko	45	39	50
Madalitso	56	38	50
Maris	65	70	71
Martha	19	23	38
Monica	-	-	-
Mcnight	40	45	51
Mwanyana	73	75	69
Oscar	43	41	50
Overton	11	40	38
Onani	51	50	48
Pemphero	66	65	72
Rose	18	21	33
Peter	31	21	40
Rally	68	65	68
Ruth	19	21	30
Regina	67	64	67
Sarah	52	58	49
Sylvester	71	65	65
Steven	19	30	33
Susan	66	68	71
Shareen	44	51	55
Siyileni	60	62	58
Takondwa	10	38	39
Tabitha	39	30	39
Trifonia	18	21	30
Victor	40	49	52
Vanessa	39	30	33
Veronica	11	21	26
Waomba	50	48	41
Yamikani	69	72	78

APPENDIX 7: Letter of permission to conduct a research at the south east education

Chancellor College,

P.O Box 280,

Zomba.

29 March, 2009.

The Education Divisional Manager,

South East Education Division,

Private Bag 48, Zomba.

Dear Sir,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN YOUR DIVISION.

I write to apply for permission to carry out a research involving teachers and learnersin your secondary schools.

I am a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School. I am pursuing a master's degree in education majoring in curriculum and teaching studies with a bias in language education. My area of interest is: Exploring language learning strategies used by learners and how they reflect their performance.

I look forward to your favourable considerations.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Michael Bayani.

APPENDIX 8: A sample letter to headteachers asking for permission to conduct a research in their secondary schools

Chancellor College,

P.O.Box 280,

Zomba.

20 March 2010.

The head teacher,

Masongola Secondary School,

South East Education Division,

Private Bag 48, Zomba.

Dear Sir/Madam,

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I write to apply for permission to carry out a research involving form three teachers and learners at your school.

I am a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School. I am pursuing a master's degree in education majoring in curriculum and teaching studies with a bias in language education. My area of interest is: Exploring language learning strategies used by learners and how they reflect their performance. Attached are my letters of introduction and permission to carry out the research from South East Education Division.

I look forward to your favourable considerations.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Michael Bayani.

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
Department of Educational Foundations

PRINCIPAL
Prof. Chris Kamlongera., B.A., DipTEO., M.A., Ph.D

P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI
Tel: (265) 01 522 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: (265) 01 522 046
Email: edf@chanco.unima.mw.

Our Ref.: Edf/6/19
Your Ref.:

5th July, 2008

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCING CATHERINE MICHAEL BAYANI

I have the pleasure to introduce to you Catherine Michael Bayani, our M.Ed [Curriculum Studies] student in the faculty of Education. To fulfill some of the requirements for the program, Catherine is investigating "students' language learning strategies". She is now required to collect data for her thesis. I, therefore, write to kindly ask for your support towards her study as she collects the data and related literature.

I thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and support.

Dr. Bob Wajizigha Chulu
Lecturer in Psychometrics & Head, Educational Foundations Department

REF. NO. SEED/ADM/VOL. II/279

29th March, 2010

FROM : THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER,

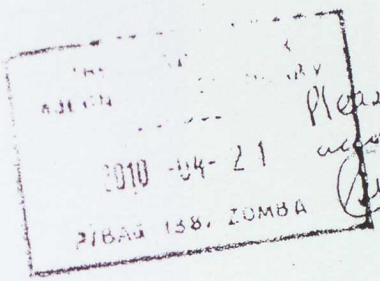
SOUTH EAST EDUCATION DIVISION,

PRIVATE BAG 48,

ZOMBA.

TO : THE HEADTEACHERS,

SEED SECONDARY SCHOOLS.



Please assist accordingly

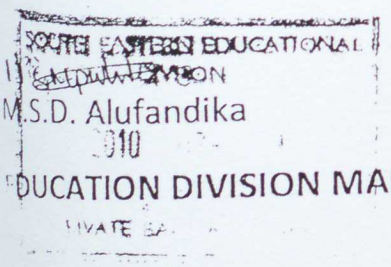
AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I write to kindly request your office to allow Ms Catherine Michael Bayani, to undertake research activities at your institutions.

Ms Catherine Bayani is a teacher at Mulunguzi Secondary School and currently she is pursuing her Master's degree in Education with the University of Malawi (Chancellor College).

I would be most grateful if Ms Bayani is given all the necessary support so that her research activities are carried out successfully.

I look forward to your usual support and hoping at the same time that you will accord this request, all the attention and urgency that it deserves.



M.S.D. Alufandika

EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER