

**PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNERS' ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

M.Ed. (EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY) THESIS

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**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

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By

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partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Education
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DECLARATION

This thesis is original and wholly my own work and it has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. I have acknowledged other people's works used herein. Therefore, I bear the responsibility for the contents of this paper.

CHISOMO VERONICA EKESI

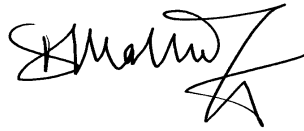
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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



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DEDICATION

To: Jerome (my husband), Rhema Tsindwi (my son), and Rhesa Tathokoza (my daughter).

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory. This was against the background that despite many efforts, trends of academic performance in national examinations pass rates showed that Malawi is behind from meeting the NESP target of 95% learning outcomes by 2017. The study used single case study, selecting one co-education day secondary school in Lilongwe Rural Education District in Central West Education Division, sampled learners, teachers and headteacher. Data was collected through a questionnaire, focus group discussions and document analysis. SPSS and QASI were used to analyse the data. Findings indicated that learners are influenced by different psychosocial factors such as personal, family and background, peers, school and community issues. Statistics show that there were variations in agreement as to which factors affect the learners (personal; discipline 50.7 % & mood 48.6 %, self-motivation, & self-financing 53 %), family and background 38.3 %, school 33.4 % & peers 31.9 % meaning that no single factor universally affect all learners, but at least some factors affect some learners. In addition, psychosocial factors have a bearing on the learners' presence and concentration in school, class, lessons and study. Therefore, the study argues that psychosocial factors are underlying elements in learners' academic performance as such educational stakeholders should strive to understand them in order to facilitate inclusive interventions in the education processes to accelerate learners' academic performance towards 100% pass rates (average for the past 5 years is at 50.3 %). In academia, knowledge gained supplements to the body of knowledge on.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	:	Acquired Immune-deficiency Syndrome
AY	:	Adventist Youth
CWED	:	Central West Education Division
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussion
GOM	:	Government of Malawi
HIV	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MANEB	:	Malawi National Examinations Board
MoEST	:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MSCE	:	Malawi School Certificate of Examinations
MY	:	Muslim Youth
NCE	:	National Centre for education
NELC	:	National Education Longitudinal Study
NESP	:	National Education Sector Plan
NYRBS	:	National Youth, Risk Behaviour Survey
QASI	:	Question Answer Summary Interpretation
SCOM	:	Student Christian Organisation of Malawi
SMASSE	:	Science and Mathematics in Secondary School Education
YCS	:	Young Christian Society

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter introduced the study on psychosocial factors affecting learners' academic performance in secondary schools in Malawi. It includes the background to the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, organisation of the thesis, and definition of terms, and summary.

1.2 Background to the study

The study aimed at exploring psychosocial factors affecting the learners' performance in a selected secondary school in Malawi. The study was conceived against the background below.

Internationally, there is a view that education is a human right and is necessary for the fulfilment of any other civil, political, economic and social right, that's according to Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 (UNESCO, 2007). This statement calls for a need for all children in the world to be educated. These statements emphasise the importance for every child in this world to be educated.

MoEST (2008) indicated that Malawi's mission was to provide quality and relevant education in Malawi that would enable people acquire relevant knowledge, skills, expertise and competences to be effective and productive citizens. Education in

Malawi is offered at different levels; kindergarten, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, colleges and universities (RIPPLE Africa, 2003). The interest of this study was on secondary school education.

In Malawi, secondary school runs for four years, and academic performance is measured by Malawi School Certificate Examination at the end of that four years administered together by Malawi National Examination Board (MoEST, 2008). Provision of education in Malawi secondary schools is offered in several categories; convention, grants aided, private schools, and open (distance) schools (MoEST, 2008). However, (MoEST, 2008) also provide evidence that there were low levels of quality of education in Malawi. It is therefore important to look at trends of academic performance at national level.

1.3 Recent trends of academic performance in secondary schools in Malawi

This section provides the trends of learners' academic performance expressed in pass percentage during one level of national examinations. It gives historical evidence of learners' academic performance in secondary schools. For the sake of this discussion, only Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) was used. MSCE is the end of secondary school cycle examination Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, 2008). Table 1 shows the trends of pass rates.

Table 1: Past trends of Malawi School Certificate of Education Results

Year	No. sat	No. passed	% passed	% male	% female
2012	130,456	58,712	45.0	28.4	16.6
2013	144,924	67,054	46.3	29.2	17.1
2014	145,674	71,709	49.2	30.4	18.8
2015	157,748	86,679	48.2	28.9	19.1
2016	153, 735	81, 417	63.0	31.6	21.4

Source: (Malawi National Examinations Board, Sept, 2017)

Table 1 represents trends in pass rates for the past five years. The trends include all learners; internal candidates, external candidates and Open and Distance Learners data. There are figures showing the total number of candidates who sat for the examinations, total number of candidates who passed, general pass rates and pass rates segregated by gender in respective years. The general trend indicates that less than half of the candidature passed the MSCE examination before the year 2016. This says a different story about quality. It was only in the year 2016 that more than half of the candidates passed examinations with the pass rate rising to 63.0 %. This means that, previously, the education attainment and achievement were not satisfactory as claimed by other stakeholders (MoEST, 2008).

There is interesting knowledge about learners' performance by gender from the information in Table 1 above, it indicates that both boys and girls did not perform satisfactorily respectively. Both boys and girls maintained a constant small rise of their pass rates 2012 to 2016. Of course, it is also noticeable that there was also a

historical fall by the boys in 2015. But they managed to go back on track in 2016. It is worth noting that figures clearly show that boys performed higher than girls during national examinations at national level. In comparison, below is a table with trends in pass rates from one selected school.

Table 2: Past trends in Malawi School Certificate of Education (School X)

Year	No. sat	No. passed	% pass	% male	% female
2008	220	134	60.9	43.6	17.3
2012	300	233	77.6	45.7	32.0
2016	238	191	80.3	47.1	33.2

Source: (Malawi National Examinations Board, Sept, 2017)

In table 2 above, there are noticeable trends in pass rates. At this school, there has been rise in pass rates over the years from 2008 to 2017. Between the years 2008 to 2017, there was an increase in the pass rates both in boys and girls. Among girls, there was a big increase in pass rates between the years 2008 and 2012. However, there was a small increase in the years between 2012 to 2017 among girls and boys. At this school, more boys pass than girls.

In comparison, the trends in pass rates between the national level and school levels differ greatly. The national pass rates are below the school's pass rates. The difference between the national pass rates from the last results to National Education Sector Plan (NESP), (MoEST, 2008) projection was at 32% whilst the difference between this school's pass rates from last results was at 14.7 %. Even though this school did not reach NESP's 95% by 2017, the gap is smaller from the national figures. It means

there are two tasks ahead. Firstly, there is need to maintain the areas that contributes towards the present trends in pass rates. Secondly, there is need to fill the 14.7 % gap. Karande and Kulkanmi (2005) made the assertion that poor school performance is a symptom reflecting a larger underlying problem(s) in children.

As a matter of interest, the above observations link with Onabamiro, Omoruyi, Soyingbe and Rosiji, (2013) which emphasized the need to examine factors that affect learners' academic performance in secondary schools. Two issues can be raised. Firstly, there is need to understand factors that could lead to the above pass rates both at national level as well as at the particular schools. Secondly, there is also need to understand how the factors influence both national and school levels in academic performance in secondary schools. The answers to the above questions would contribute in understanding the learning and living conditions of the learners. Thereby, assisting in designing effective interventions to maintain and raise pass rate

The evidence above clearly indicated that for five years, the learners' pass rates continued to hovers below 50 % without touching 60% until 2016. There is still a difference of 32% if comparison can be made between the last pass rate of 63.0 % to the 95% target of National Education Sector Plan (NESP) by 2017 (MoEST, 2008). This shows that there are achievement gaps. Shannon and Bylsma (2002) described achievement gaps as differences between how a group performs and the expected performance of the group according to NESP projection. Many factors could attribute to the pass rates above at national level as well as at particular schools.

The information above provides evidence for the national trends in the provision of education in Malawi secondary schools.

In addition, another important fact is to know what other stakeholders observe on academic performance of learners in secondary schools in Malawi. For instance, MoEST (2008) observed that there were poor learning achievements in Malawi whereby only 50% of learners pass national examinations at the end of secondary school education years. This suggests that trends in academic performance had not been satisfactory.

It is essential to consider that pass or failure has a reflection on a person's life. For instance, it was reported that secondary school education in Malawi remains something of great importance to most Malawians, and a goal which most young people strive towards (RIPPLE Africa, 2003). In Nigeria, it was also noted that a person harbours the educational interests and accomplishments projected from psychosocial variables in the environment (Onocha, 1985 cited in Onabamiro, et. al, 2013). The claims above necessitate examination of factors that contribute towards learners' academic performance in secondary schools.

Understanding factors that contribute to learners' academic performance is essential. There is a range of factors (family, drug and substance abuse, peers) that affects quality of academic performance of students in schools (Waters & Marzano, 2006 cited in Farooq, et. al, 2011, Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014,). In Malawi (MoEST,2008) accounted for the low quality of education by citing several issues such as inadequate

teachers, insufficient teaching and learning materials, shortage of teaching facilities, and deficient school management.

It has been demonstrated in many research studies (Wong & Taylor, 1996, Chimombo et al., 2000; Schiller, Khmelkov & Wang, 2002; Iannotti & Bush, 1992, Gibbons & Telhaj, 2006; Tope, 2011, Onabamiro, et.al, 2013) that different psychosocial factors affect learners' academic performance. Psychosocial issues are patterns of change in emotions, personality and social relationships (Papalia & Fieldman, 2012). These studies provide evidence that psychosocial factors contribute towards learners' academic performance in schools. It entails that it is worthwhile to understand the psychosocial factors that influences learners in academic performance in secondary schools in Malawi.

This study opted to take up the task of investigating the psychosocial factors that affect the learners' academic performance in Malawi's one secondary school. In general, understanding factors that contribute towards learners' academic achievement is necessary. Specifically, psychosocial factors could assist designers on the effective and efficient interventions to boost academic achievements. Old studies, Smith, Cowrie and Blades (1998) reported that, in America, such efforts helped in coming up with one of interventions in their schools called 'Project head Start' that aimed at stimulating cognitive and language development in children who had problems of education disadvantages and under-achievements due to psychosocial factors such as family and home issues.

1.4 Problem statement

There is evidence which indicates that there are gaps in academic performance among learners in secondary schools (MoEST, 2008) which suggest that there were low quality of education in Malawi in the past years as a result many different factors. Some studies like Wong and Taylor (1996), Chimombo, Chibwana, Dzimadzi, Kumkwezu, Kunje, & Nampota (2000), Schiller, Khmelkov and Wang (2002), Iannotti and Bush (1992), Gibbons and Telhaj (2006), Tope (2011), Onabamiro, et. al (2013) spell out many different psychosocial factors influence learners' academic performance in secondary schools.

The above mentioned studies were conducted on independent psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance such as family and home background (Schiller, Khmelkov & Wang, 2002), personal (Iannotti & Bush, 1992), peers (Wong & Taylor, 1996; Gibbons & Telhaj, 2006; Tope, 2011), school (Chimombo et al., 2000), self-efficacy (Onabamiro, et. al., 2013). These previous studies have examined the effects of some psychosocial factors as single factors influencing academic performance in secondary schools.

In most of the studies mentioned above, the study focused on single psychosocial factor that affect learners' academic performance. The idea that many psychosocial factors possibly affect learners' academic performance was reached by looking at several study results. For the studies undertaken in Malawi, there's not been a special focus on psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance. Therefore, this study focused on investigate the possible variety of existing psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance in a selected secondary school. This

will lead to acquisition of knowledge of and understanding of the psychosocial factors that influence the learners, (and their interaction) on learners' academic performance in secondary schools.

The study findings will add up to existing knowledge that is useful in improving quality and relevant interventions to some learners' conditions, failing which there will be recurrence of the unsatisfactory trends in academic performance among learners in secondary schools.

1.5 Purpose of the study

This study intended to explore underlying psychosocial factors that influence academic performance of learners in a selected secondary school in Malawi.

1.6 Research questions

The study was guided by the following main and specific research questions:

1.6.1 Main research question

How do psychosocial factors influence the academic performance of learners in secondary schools in Malawi?

1.6.2 Specific research questions:

1. What are the psychosocial factors affecting learners' academic performance in secondary school?
2. What are the effects of psychosocial factors on learners' academic performance in secondary schools?

1.7 Significance of the study

Firstly, the study findings would provide some evidence on possible psychosocial factors that affect the learners' academic performance. These findings would guide decision-making on priority areas for intervention in policy making and implementation concerning academic performance in secondary school to control the unsatisfactory pass rates (the average for the past 5 years at 50.3 %) which do not reach 100 %.

Secondly, study findings would be vital in academic field. Initially, it will add to the body of existing knowledge on learners' performance, specifically, psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance. In addition, it will have a great bearing on education researchers in Malawi and elsewhere as a background on which more studies on psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance will depart from.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

The study is made up of five chapters. These chapters present distinct content relevant to its function.

Chapter two presents discussions on relevant studies on some psychosocial factors influencing academic performance and their implications and theoretical framework according to Urie Bronfenbrenner. Literature serves to show that the study on psychosocial factors influencing learners' academic performance is a relevant issue in education sector, and also gives guidance to the direction of the study.

Chapter three comprises the methodologies issues. It gives and explains theoretical paradigm, approach, study design, population and sampling, data collection procedures and analysis, validity and reliability of the data and ethical considerations that guided to successful conduct this study.

Chapter four presents findings and discussions of the study. It provides background of respondents, concurrent presentation and discussions of findings according to research questions in a categorized arrangement of the psychosocial factors influencing learners' academic performance in the selected secondary school.

Chapter five presents the summary of the study, the major conclusions and implications from the major findings of the research study. At the end, there are suggestions for further study on this topic.

1.9 Definition of terms

Psychosocial factors: individual (biological) and social (environmental) conditions that influence on the patterns of behaviour or development of an individual.

Academic performance: achievement patterns in education that is expressed in marks, grades or points, at different levels.

Learners' factors: individual learners' conditions that affect learners' performance.

Family and home background factors: parental/guardian and household characteristics that have bearing on a learner.

Physical factors: biological and geographical conditions surrounding the learners which maybe temporary or permanent.

School (factors): a learning institution, conditions in the institution that may affect the learners' in their academic performance.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study. It provided a detailed background to the study which included the motivation to carry out the study. The background contained information that showed the trends of pass rates at MSCE which is a national level in order to understand the academic performance trends in Malawi secondary schools. The problem statement explained the need to carry out the study, plus highlighting how this study is different from other studies. In addition, it also informed the purpose of carrying out the study. This chapter also outlined research questions (both main and specific). Furthermore, there was an outline of the significance of the study to stakeholders in education as well as the academic field. Last but not one, there was a presentation of how the organisation of the thesis chapter by chapter. Finally, there were a definition of terms as understood and used in the thesis. The next chapter discussed two things; the relevant literature on psychosocial factors that influences learners' academic performance in secondary schools for broader understanding of the topic under study and the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter reviews literature on psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance across the globe. It presents discussions on relevant studies on some psychosocial factors influencing academic performance and their implications, and theoretical framework based on Urie Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological theory on development which guided and directed this research.

2.2 Psychosocial factors that affect learners academic performance and their effects.

Psychosocial issues are patterns of change in emotions, personality, and social relationships (Papalia & Fieldman, 2012). According to Papalia and Mortorrell (2014), psychosocial issues can be understood as the socially and culturally influenced processes of development of the ego or the self. Psychosocial issues encompass individual as well as environmental issues of a person. They can vary from personal issues, parental, family and home characteristics, society issues in time and location. This research study argues that psychosocial factors make a contribution towards a learners' academic performance at secondary school level.

2.2.1 Family background

There are substantial claims that family and home background describe and predict a child's life chances. For instance, Onabamiro, et. al, (2013) had asserted that the family provides the primary education environment. Some studies showed that regardless of national context, where parents have more education, they appear more able to provide their children with the academic and social support for educational success when compared to parents with less education (Schiller, Khmelkov, Wong, 2002). On the other hand, sometimes it is not what the parent have or not but what the student perceptions of parental support and involvement are. If students' perceptions are positive on their parents support and involvement, they will achieve well; Gronlnick & Slowiaczek (1994); Wang & Wildman (1995); Schiller, Khmelkov & Wang (2002). Engin-Denior (2009 cited in Dimbisso, 2011) reported that girl students perceived that parental lack of support contributed towards girls passing and motivation to go to next levels of educations compared to support that would surely be given to boys. The implications are parental support may not arise only from what they have or not but also the parents' willingness to support a child based on various reasons. All in all, the above claims show that parental support is important towards the students' achievement.

On the other hand, social economic class or socio-economic status can be understood as an individual's income, occupation and prestige in the society (Slavin, 2006). If a child is from a low social class, s/he is affected in attitudes, behaviour, educational background and support and financial constraints. The effects of which may lead to school-drop-outing. Mwale (1988) viewed socio-economic factor as the most difficult category affecting students. Mwale argued for the following socio-economic factors that affect students; parents' interests in and knowledge of education, parental

capability and willingness to pay school fees for their children, other expenses in school such as school uniform. Again, Mwale emphasized adolescences as the age mostly found in secondary schools but are prone to face many psychosocial challenges including; juvenile delinquency, drug and substance abuse, early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. In view of the discussion above, it is noted that the children themselves also have issues that affect their behaviour and development apart from the external factors such as family social background.

In Malawi, research findings of MacJessie-Mbewe and Kholowa (2010) indicate that socio-economic status does not only define differences in students but also contribute to different achievement levels. They reiterated that it brings social inequalities. As a result, there is replication of tomorrow's social inequalities. At least with poverty, there cannot be a celebration of individual differences.

In a study conducted by Bweya (2009) in Zomba using both qualitative and quantitative methods on 150 respondents, it was revealed that poverty affects learners' school and class attendance due to factors such as: lack of basic necessities at home and school; indulgence in income generating activities such as selling commodities at the market. In earlier studies, another scholar, Fox (1995) agrees that learners often miss school due to family responsibilities which incapacitate them to connect and understand lessons, loss of interest in subjects leading to low academic performance.

In addition, parenting styles also influence learners' behaviour and academic performance (Slavin, 2006). Woolfolk (2007) described parenting styles as parents'

ways of interacting with and disciplining a child. She explained that this is judged by assessing the warmth and control parents exert on the children.

In a nutshell, family and home background have potential to influence the learners' academic performance both positively and negatively. Family and Parents can offer financial and material resources (school fees, school uniform, etc.), technical support e.g. studying together and emotional support through encouragement. The impact can be shown on school attendance, competences and resources acquisition.

2.2.2 Drug and substance abuse

Related studies indicate that peers influence each other to indulge in drug and substance abuse. One study argued that there is peer influence in male and female adolescents' decisions to smoke (Curberg, 1992; Stacy, et. al., 1992 cited in Wong & Taylor, 1996). While another study added that there is peer influence in the use of drugs (Iannotti & Bush, 1992).

Brooks & Brooks (1999) had asserted that drug use by either individual or peer influence has both direct and indirect impacts on individual's aspects in life such as risky behaviour, suffering from emotional disorders and lower productivity. According to Brook, direct effects to academic performance include; decreased concentration, shifting resources away from school, absenteeism, lower expectation about academic performance and the shifting of peers which mainly benefit from lack of parental supervision.

Engeberg, Morral, & King (2006) examined the relationship between adolescents' substance abuse in academic outcomes. The study findings revealed that substance abuse leads to the individuals' abilities being reduced in sustainable engagements of academic pursuits. This study outlined two impacts of adolescent substance abuse namely; direct impacts of substance use on cognitive skills and behavioural risk factors associated with substance use in adolescence. Therefore, this study indicates that substance abuse has negative effects on academic performance of the adolescents because it affects cognitive and behavioural aspects of the individual.

In United States of America, a study 2013 National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) by Kann et. al (2014) showed a negative association between alcohol and other drug use and academic achievement. Two implications can be drawn. Students with higher grades are less likely to engage in alcohol and drug use behaviour than their classmates with lower grades. Students who do not engage in risk behaviour receive higher grades than other students.

A study by Afolayan & Afolayan (2010) on drug addiction and its implications in selected secondary schools in Nigeria revealed that drug abuse has negative impact on its victims (students). This study made a specific reference to secondary school students.

Earlier studies such as Mwale (1988) cited drug and substance abuse as one of the risk-taking behaviours among the adolescents. According to Mwale, drug abuse takes five different patterns: as a social recreation, an experimental use, a circumstantial past time, an intensified habit and a compulsion. Mwale expressed concern over the

effects of drugs. Some of its threats were psychological, physical and academic effects. Academic implication of such behaviour could be truancy.

The evidence in the studies above had some implications. Firstly, there is existence of drug and substance use and abuse among secondary school students. Secondly, both boys and girls abuse drug and substances. Thirdly, some students are influenced by peers in their decisions to abuse drugs and substances. Fourthly, drug and substance abuse negatively affect learners' academic performance. As such, relationship between youth and drugs and substances must be seriously monitored to control academic behaviour.

2.3.3 Peer relations

Wong & Taylor's (1996) study found that there was a relationship between peer pressure and academic performances. Far from the tendency of attributing adolescents' misconduct to peer pressure, Wong and Taylor dispelled that myth by putting forward three arguments based on research evidence based on a sample of 623 African American and 331 European American eighth graders responding to questionnaires and analysing record data. Firstly, peer influences vary with individual differences. Secondly, peer pressure has positive impact on students' motivation, academic development, academic progress at different levels and outcomes as well as valuing schooling. Thirdly, peer influence varies with different ethnic backgrounds. Wong and Taylor underscored the importance of individual choice and level of conformity to the group for either positive or negative peer influence. Gibbons & Telhaj (2006) conducted a study to investigate whether peer effects affect pupils' progress as they transit from primary to secondary school in England. The question

was whether the pupil will be challenged by new friends and environment and also perhaps old friends in the new environment, will their performance remain the same? The study had a composition of respondents representing 99% from total population drawn purposely from community schools. The study compared information about pupil assessments on entry age as prior attainment and achievement results on Government Standard Point Scores. The study revealed that peer-effects exist when pupils transit from primary to secondary school. However, where pupils choose their peers on abilities or personalities, there is relatively a small contribution to the variation in academic progress with a standard deviation ranging between 0.05 - 0.08. Still, there are indirect benefits such as physical security, emotional security, familiarity, life-time friendship networks and simply exclusivity.

Pastrana & Battle (2007) made the assertion that students can be influenced by many factors, including peer relations. In Pastrana & Battle's study, it was revealed that the assertion is true, plus little or no childhood peer relationships have dire consequences for students' academic achievement. This study showed that absence of friends is also a problem that can affect learners' performance. There are two implications; good peer relationships foster academic achievement, negative peer relationship fosters low academic achievement.

Furthermore, other studies provided insights into how peers influence each other. In Shin (2007) study, it was discovered that there was a link between an individual and peer influence in as far as the individual acceptance of peers and the amount and degree of friendships is concerned. Of greater importance are the revelations that a person can only be influenced by the peers s/he is in a peer relationship with, and the

degree at which the group does things together which suggests that the longer the time and activities done with peers the higher the impact on the individual member.

Another study by Cihak, Kirk & Boon (2009) also explored effects of peer relationship on academic performance. The study used 19 third grade pupils (eleven male and eight female), in an inclusive setting in America. The study used an experimental investigation method; before, process and post-evaluation to check the effects of students self-reporting on their classmates' pro-social behaviours like tootling as a disruptive behaviour. The findings revealed that pupils reporting on their classmates as an intervention on peer control is an effective intervention. This lead to an inference that peer relation has an impact on peer behaviour. In later studies, it was maintained that during adolescence, the amount of influence that peer groups have on one's academic achievement is enormous (Tope, 2011).

In the studies mentioned above, it can be established that peers are an inevitable fact in the life of the children or learners. It was also indicated that peers exert influence on each other whether positive or negative depending on the type of relationship. As such, studies and intervention should essentially not overlook it.

2.4.4 School-based factors

It is claimed that in Africa, education determinants are many. For instance, Leach et al. (2003) study showed that school factors such as facilities and teacher quality and quantity affect the education achievements and attainments by girls. While the above study focused on the education issues of girls, it succeeds in bringing out issues that

affect some learners in schools and lessons. It adds up on the factors that may influence learners' academic performance.

Studies in Malawi also indicate that school-based and classroom-based factors affect learners' learning as well as their academic performance. In the study by Chimombo et al. (2000), it was revealed that school-based factors such as features and incentives (for example sports kits and games) attract and keep learners in school. In addition, classroom factors such as seating plans, learner-to-learner relationships, gender and power dynamics and many more, affect learners' participation and performance in class. This serves to show that school factors in general as well as classroom factors can be responsible for learners' education achievement because they contribute towards motivation and de-motivation to school attendance, lesson participation and performance.

The related literature above has exposed and discussed to some extent the psychosocial factors that surround learners' academic performance. The lessons from literature also show that there are indeed psychosocial factors influencing the learners in their academic performance. The discussion above noted that family and home background, drug and substance abuse and peers relationships are few of the psychosocial factors that have direct influences on the learners' academic life. However, they served to affirm the fact that there exist factors that influence learners in their academic performances. The psychosocial factors have the propensity to influence the learners either positively or negatively. Further to that, implications were drawn to show how they influence learners in their life in general, and on academic performance in particular. Such influences included choice of peers, attendance and absence from school/classes, availability of resources, and technical

support systems. In addition, it is worth to mention that psychosocial factors are not limited to the aforementioned. There could be more. Therefore, the study has the advantage of adding onto this fact.

2.3 Theoretical framework: Urie Bronfenbrenner: Bio-Ecological theory

(The social context for development)

2.3.1 Bio-ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's theory is also referred to as Bio-ecological model on human development. Bronfenbrenner had used the effects of the great depression in order to check for outcomes reflecting developmental competency (e.g. mental ability, academic achievement, social skills). The bio-aspect of the model recognizes that an individual brings their biological self's to the developmental process. The ecological aspect recognizes that the social contexts in which an individual develop are ecosystems because they are in constant interaction and influence each other. Bronfenbrenner's research developed from underweight infants and effects of great depression. Bronfenbrenner had used the effects of the great depression in order to check for outcomes reflecting developmental competency (e.g. mental ability, academic achievement, social skills). As such, Bronfenbrenner theory can be used in Malawi in the discussions about child academic performance or achievements in general.

According to Gauvain & Cole (2009), there are two main propositions. Proposition one asset that from an early age, throughout life course, human development takes place between an active and evolving bio-psychological human organism and persons, objects, systems and its immediate environment- preferably regular and long term

interactions. The second proposition asserts that the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person. About the environment, both the immediate and more remote, in which the processes are taking place, determine the nature of the developmental outcome. Bronfenbrenner went further to map the many interactions with the social context that affect an individual's development. In his bio-ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner believed that the social context is important for development of an individual (Woolfolk, 2007). Bronfenbrenner outlined five environmental systems that surround, interact and influence an individual child for development. Table 3 is a brief summary prepared to outline Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological model on human development.

Table 3: A Brief summary of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model of Human Development

Environmental system	Characteristics
Micro-system	Aspects that provide direct influence on a child e.g. divorce by parents, attention of a teacher, peer aggression just to mention a few.
Meso-system	Interactions among all factors in the micro-system. For example, the child may withdraw from peers because s/he is not loved at home.
Exo-system	The child is influenced by actions, people; things not directed connected to him e.g. mass media, school district, extended family, social services (health, security, etc.)
Macro-system	The child is influenced by his/her own cultural values and traditions, family and home's socio-economic status, and the legal systems.
Chrono-system	The child is influenced by time; by aging, shifts in ones or others lifespan like parent's divorce, death of a close member of the family.

The theory suggested that human development takes place through the interactions between the bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols, systems, laws in an individual's immediate as well as the outer settings in life. Papalia & Feldman (2012) had also observed that according to Bronfenbrenner, a child's character is built from the influence of all levels of context of a child's life, with explicit mention of the immediate family, and school towards academic activities and academic performance.

2.3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory

This section discusses the analysis of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory in view of its strengths and weaknesses. Table 4 shows a summary of the strengths and weaknesses.

Table 4: The strengths and weaknesses of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
There are many different multiple actors and forces surrounding an individual for his development (diverse environment).	There are no value judgments, whether one or the other factor is more important than the other.
There are many different actors and forces interact among themselves as they develop an individual.	It does not show moderation among the actors and forces while they influence the learner to avoid laxity (showing less responsibility) as well as extremity (exerting too much pressure) towards the individual.

Bronfenbrenner underscores the role of the individual and the environment in which one is found in interacting for development of an individual. Consequently, the quality of the environment defines the quality of the individual development. This implies that settings such as schools, family backgrounds and workplaces are important for individual development. The theory alludes to differences in individuals' identity by expressing those different factors within one's environment

can interact physically as well as in time. That is so because individuals come from different environments in space and time. Secondly, the theory shows how multiple influences affect the child's development even when the child is not directly involved in the situation.

There are some areas of weaknesses. Theory admits that both the immediate and outer environment has impact on the environment; however, it does not explain how this is done. In addition, there is no moderation of impact on a child according to these factors. Is there no danger to either exert too much pressure on the child or diffuse responsibility among the too many actors in the vast environment? On the other hand, the theory does not predict what sort of product the individual will be given that many different players has impact in developmental life. There are five environmental systems.

Furthermore, there are some educational implications. Woolfolk (2007) pointed out two implications to the teacher. Firstly, the theory shows that the influences in all social systems are reciprocal. Secondly, there are many dynamic forces that interact to create the context for individual development. Therefore, it is imperative for educational stakeholders, teachers, parents and family, school and peers to understand these forces in order to know, understand and assist a learner better.

2.3.3 The utility of the theory on the study

Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory had a huge bearing on this study in two ways. Firstly, it guided the study in identifying the possible direct and indirect psychosocial factors that surround the learners in their life. Secondly, it directed the

study in overseeing the possibility of different factors overlapping their roles as they affect the learners. Thirdly, it gave an insight into explaining how the different factors could affect learners' academic performance. Of course, this research study has concentrated only on education as a development aspect.

2.3.4 A concept model of psychosocial factors that affect a learners' academic behaviour

This study understands that the learner, as a child in a given environment, can be affected in one way or another by many different factors. At the centre, the individual there's learner himself/herself. He/she can be responsible for him/herself. Beyond that, there are parents, schools and the large environment itself. So, in trying to understand the learner, all the possible factors surrounding the learner should be looked into. On another note, there seems to be an overlap between some factors such as the school and parents. On that notice, deliberate measures should be made to understand how that that works in real situation. In this study, all issues highlighted here were taken into consideration. The figure below tried to illustrate that point.

The Psychosocial factors that affect a learners' academic behaviour

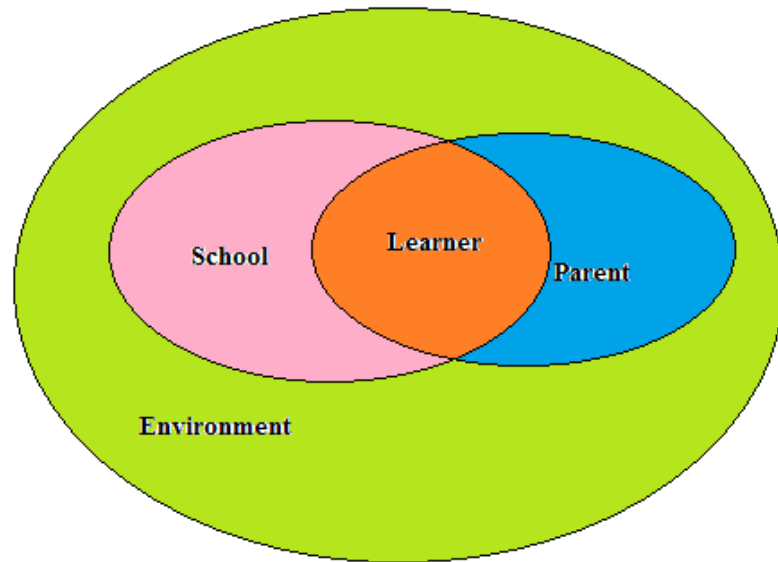


Figure 1: a concept model of psychosocial factors that affect a learners' academic behaviour (Source: researcher, 2018)

All in all, Bronfenbrenner theory was used in this study to discuss about factors that affect children's academic performance or achievements in general.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed literature related to psychosocial factors that influence academic performance in schools. There were two sections: a detailed discussion on relevant studies on some psychosocial factors affecting learners' academic performance internationally and locally and their implications, and theoretical framework. The theory outlined and discussed to guide the study was Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The two areas discussed locate this study within the existing body of knowledge, as well as linking theory and practice. The chapter ended an illustration conceptualised from the examination of the theory, on how it can be used to guide the study. The next chapter discussed how the research design and methods were carried out.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents study methodology that was used by the researcher to obtain relevant information. This chapter described the theoretical paradigm, study design, study area, population and sampling, data collection procedures, data processing and analysis, reliability and validity, and ethical issues.

3.2. Theoretical Paradigm

This study was guided by pragmatism as a theoretical paradigm for the choice of the research design. Pragmatism is described as a philosophical movement that contends that an ideology can only be true if only it works satisfactorily. Pragmatism also describes the research that has combined methods; qualitative and quantitative (Creswell & Plano, 2007). In the mixed approach, there is an interplay of methods which utilizes the strength from both philosophies and enhance true. In this study, the question on psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance was subjected to both qualitative and quantitative methods to establish the truth on how many learners really think these are issues in their life or not, and to allow the respondents themselves to give an account of how the psychosocial factors affect their academic life.

3.3. Research design

This research study took the case study design. According to Kombo and Tromp (2009), a case study has an advantage of bringing about deeper insights and better understanding of the problems faced by students. There were several aspects that the research study considered. Firstly, it meant to concentrate on one school among many. Secondly, the study aimed at collecting original data direct from respondents concerning their perceptions on psychosocial factors that affect the learners' academic performance. Thirdly, it wanted an in-depth knowledge of the issues under study. This design was appropriate in this study because the quality and quantity of the information would be achieved.

This research study adopted the exploratory case study type. According to Yin (2009) an exploratory case study has higher chances of describing a phenomena though it is rigorous, limits generalisation and requires a lot of time. In this study the results have the limitation of just describing the psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance at that selected school but not generalise to other schools.

3.4 Research Methodology

This research study took the mixed method approach. Fraenkel & Wallen, (2009) describe the mixed method approach as the use of both the qualitative and the quantitative research methods in one study. Johnson (2007) describes mixed methods research design as a type of research in which a researcher(s) combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches for purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. By using qualitative methods, the study intended to collect thick and in-depth information through interviews from participants, teachers

and headteacher that would provide description on how psychosocial experiences affect their academic performance. On the other hand, by using quantitative methods, the study intended to capture descriptive statistical information that could show numbers/figures to quantify participants' responses in forms of frequencies and percentages. The results reflects both quantitative and qualitative results of the findings.

This research study adopted the concurrent mixed method also known as concurrent triangulation design. Creswell (2014) describes a concurrent triangulation design as a study type whereby a researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently then compares both data bases to determine if there is convergence, differences or combinations. This approach was beneficial in that it allowed the researcher to collect, analyse, report, and discuss both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study. However, the study was largely a qualitative research. The concurrent mixed method enabled efficient use of time and resources in the sense that data was collected within the same period of time. The figure below illustrates how a concurrent triangulation method was done.

The concurrent triangulation procedure on data collection and processing

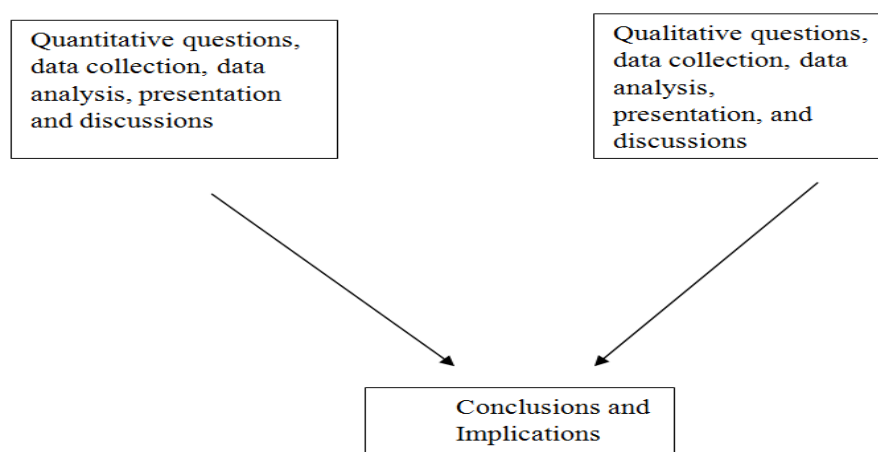


Figure 2: A concurrent triangulation method model (Source: researcher, 2018)

Figure 2 shows that there was a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods at all points in order to get comprehensive results at the end. Both data collection and analysis were done the same time. It means data collection; data processing, data presentation and discussion reflect ideas from both approaches.

3.5 Selection of study site

The research study was conducted in Central West Education Division in Central Malawi. This is an administrative division in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology responsible for all education issues in four districts in central region namely; Lilongwe, Dedza, Ntcheu and Mchinji. The study area was within the Lilongwe Rural East Education District. It is a co-education, in the boundary of urban and rural setting. The study chose one secondary school that is co-education in order to capture information for both male and female students.

The study was conducted between February and July 2017 during the third academic term of Malawi Secondary School Calendar year of 2017. A pilot study or pre-test

was conducted during mid- February while the main study was conducted in two weeks in March. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time as recommended in a concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2014). The main study was conducted in the month of July within the same academic year.

3.5.1 Population and Sample Size

A sample is a set of respondents selected from a larger population for the purpose of survey (Kombo & Tromp, 2009). Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1995) also describe a sample as a group of respondents selected from a population for the purpose of a research. The study sample came from a total population of 1259 learners: 762 boys and 497 girls, 65 teachers, and one headteacher. The sample of learners came from form three. The total population of learners in form three was 299: 188 boys and 111 girls. In total, the sample size was 106 people. The sample included 100 learners, 5 teachers (2 males and 3 females, from those teaching form three) and one headteacher. Look at the summary in Table 5:

Table 5: Sample size

S/N	CATEGORY	NUMBER
1	Learners	100
2	Teachers	5
3	Headteacher	1
TOTAL		106

Learners were sampled using stratified sampling. Kombo & Tromp (2009) described stratified sampling as the kind of sampling that involves dividing the population into homogeneous groups, whereby each group containing subjects with similar characteristics. In this study, stratified sampling was to make sure that both boys and girls at the chosen study area to be proportionally, represented well in the study. The assumption was that they have been assessed at different times and different levels so

they could easily make judgments over their academic performance. The teachers were conveniently sampled because it was not easy to find all teachers in school since it is a doubled-shift school. Secondly, most teachers were not reporting daily since the study took place during end of term three examination periods. The headteacher and teachers were chosen as key informant interviewees. Lavrakas (2008) describes key informant interviewee as a person who is a proxy for his /her associations at an organisation or group. The headteacher and teachers were rightly positioned to know some issues above learners and academic life in this school.

3.6 Data generation procedure

This study collected both primary and secondary data. Primary data are those that are collected first time, or original character, whilst secondary data are those which have already been passed through analysis process (Kothari, 2004). The study intended to collect primary data because it was seeking perceptions from learners, teachers and headteacher on psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance.

Primary data was collected from the sampled respondents with an aim of getting first-hand information from the source. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. A questionnaire is a research instrument that gathers data over a large sample (Kombo & tromp, 2009). The questionnaires collected quantitative data. The questionnaire was administered to learners only. The interviews collected qualitative data. The interviews were conducted with the learners, teachers and the headteacher. The interviews were conducted through focus group discussions (FGDs). It means there were two focus group discussions; learners' FGD and teachers' FGD. There was one-to-one interview with the headteacher. Therefore, the data collected was fresh and original. The researcher was available during the time respondents were

working on the questionnaires for clarifications or any questions to ensure that data collected was correct.

The researcher was solely responsible for data collection and data procedures. The researcher was responsible in distribution and collection of questionnaires to and from the learners as well as conducting FGD's. The interview guides were issued to the interviewees just before the discussions in order give the interviewees some time to reflect and prepare for the responses. It has been mentioned above that questionnaires and interview guides were previously pilot-tested for perfection in concepts, wording and timing.

In addition, Secondary data came from document analysis. Document analysis involves analysing contents of documentary materials such as book, public records etc. (Kothari, 2004). The documents which were analysed were MANEB pass lists and the schools past pass lists. Secondary data was intended to give information about the trends of learners' academic performance during national examinations for the past years. Secondary data collection was done in subsequent days after the administration of questionnaires and interviews.

3.6 Data processing and data analysis

Data processing has been described as a systematic, well-planned procedure to avoid errors and to get the most of the best research data (Creswell, 2014). On the other hand, data analysis involves descriptive and inferential numerical analysis in quantitative methods and description and thematic text and image analysis in qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014). Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected at the same time, but organised and analysed differently. Marshal and Rossman (2006) recommend reading through, organisation, patterning and naming,

coding, integration and generalisation. In addition, qualitative data was organised using the Question Answer Summary Interpretation (QASI) model. Firstly, qualitative data was read through (the recorded responses from the focus group discussions with the learners, teachers and the interview with the headteacher. Secondly, the data was organised according to research questions, isolating issues that were clearly coming out as prominent from all respondents. Data was synthesised according to issues that were similar as they were emerging from the respondents, for instance, issues that could follow under learners' personal issues, family and home background etc., but from the three different types of respondents (learners, teachers and headteacher). Later, data was interpreted to giving logical and sensible meaning. The themes that were generated were; personal, family and home background issues, school, and peer factors that affect learner's academic performance. Later it was integrated with the quantitative data for presentation and discussions.

Quantitative data was read-through, coded and processed. Data was entered using statistical computer package namely; CPro 6.3 and SPSS 20.0. The data was entered in CPro 6.3 then converted to SPSS 20.0 for analysis. The SPSS data analysis process produced descriptive statistical products such as percentiles, mean, and range and frequencies from which tables were generated. The quantitative data was later integrated with qualitative data for presentation and discussion. In all, quantitative data results indicated learners' responses in frequencies and percentages according to themes that were developed with qualitative data. On the other hand, the themes generated from the qualitative data described the story behind the figures or numbers in the quantitative data.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Validity is described as the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences researchers make based on the data they collect (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). On the other hand, reliability is referred to as the consistency of scores obtained (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Gibbs (2007) cited in Creswell (2014) outlined some of the matters for reliability which include checking manuscripts for obvious mistakes, triangulating different data sources of information, and use of member checking, just to mention a few. The researcher addressed matters of validity and reliability in this research study. Firstly, the research instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides were pilot-tested in a different school prior to main data collection exercise. Such activity allowed reviewing, revising, modifying of items for clarity, and sensibility. The research tools (questionnaire & interview guide) and plan were refined. The tools were refined for clarity and length (number of items). The number of items was reduced by rephrasing the questions. Initially, the plan was to collect all data one single day. Revised plan was to collect data according to the flexibility of the respondents. The length of both the questionnaires and interview guides was also checked. Secondly, time and effort were deliberately dedicated for data instrument preparation, reviewing and administration. Fourthly, the instruments were reviewed by experts and peers both during pilot and main-study. Thirdly, there was use of multiple instruments to ensure validity of the collected. In addition, the original manuscript has been kept for checking and re-checking for any errors, data was triangulated, and peers and other experts have checked the report written in this study. It was noted after collection of questionnaires that 12 respondents had refrained from responding (submitted unanswered questionnaires), and very few left out some items unanswered.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Just as in any kind of study, in mixed methods study, it is essential to consider matters of protection, respect, and prevention of physical and psychological harm to participants (Fraenkel & Wallen (2009). Babbie (2000) outlined the following issues to consider in matters of ethics; voluntary participation, no harm to the participants, anonymity and confidentiality, deception, cross-checking with institutional review board, analysis and reporting of findings. The following measures were undertaken to be in line with some of the recommendations. Firstly, clearance and introduction was sought from institutions such as the college and the headteacher before meeting with the respondents as a way of cross-checking with institutional review board. Secondly, there was an explicit mention of the intention of the research in the preamble of both instruments (questionnaire and interview guide) to avoid aspects of deception. Thirdly, respondents' confidentiality was explicitly mentioned in the preamble of the questionnaire and interview guide as well as no mention of their identities was done in the analysis and reporting of the findings. Respondents' confidentiality and anonymity was also assured by assigning numbers to the learners' questionnaires, and position and responsibility to the teachers and headteacher and not their names. Fourthly, respondents' respect was addressed by seeking formal consent by their appending signatory before the participants participated in the data collection exercise as well as verbally expressing their consent for the interviews.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the methodology used to carry out the study. The theoretical paradigm gave insight into the methods chosen and the reason for the choice. The discussions on research study design explained the type and reason for its

choice. There was also a discussion about the study area which included information about the location within the education division and district, population and sample. In addition, there was also a detailed description of data generation, processing and data analysis procedures and its justification. It demonstrated that since it is a mixed methods study, procedures and tools for collecting data should reflect the presence and use requirements for such kind of study. Furthermore, the chapter outlined how issues of validity and reliability were handled during the study to make results acceptable. Lastly, a look at matters of ethical considerations described the efforts made to assure respondents' safety and confidentiality as well as generally, how research standards were observed. In the next chapter, there are discussions of study findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will mainly present the findings and discussions of both primary and secondary data. Initially, there is a presentation of background characteristic of respondents in terms of age and gender. This is followed by presentation and discussion of findings. Discussion are concerning both research questions are done concurrently.

4.2 Background Characteristics of the respondents

As a case study, one school among many was chosen. Out of many schools in Lilongwe Rural Education district, one day secondary school was chosen. There is a probability of learners displaying some background similarities and differences because learners came from within the same catchment area. As indicated, the study explored different psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance at secondary school.

4.2.1 Age and gender of the learner participants

The findings showed that out of the 90 students who responded, only 85 respondents indicated their background details, of which, 50 (59%) were boys and 35(41%) were girls. Their ages ranged from 14 years old to 21 years old. The mean age is 17 years. The majority (49 learners) fell between the ranges of 16 to 17 years old. See the summarised information in Table 6 below.

Table 6: A summary of age of learners by gender

R e s p o n d e n t s		G e n d e r o f L e a r n e r s			
		F e m a l e		M a l e	
Age of Learners	1 4	0	1	0	0
	1 5	0	1	0	9
	1 6	0	3	2	1
	1 7	1	2	1	3
	1 8	1	0	0	6
	1 9	0	6	0	1
	2 1	0	2	0	0
T O T A L	8 5	5	0	3	5

Source: field work (31 July, 2017, school X)

4.3 Psychosocial Factors that Affect the Learners' Academic Performance

The study findings shows that there are psychosocial factors that affect the learners' academic performance in selected secondary school (personal; discipline 50.7 % & mood 48.6 %, self-motivation, & self-financing 53 %), family and background 38.3 %, school 33.4 % & peers 31.9 %. The psychosocial factors have been categorised into personal issues, family and home background issues, school and community issues, and peer. In the discussions below, there is a presentation and discussion of each of the above mentioned issues supported with voices of participants and descriptive statistics. Look at the figure 3 that illustrates the four main issues that affect the learners.

A summary of the psychosocial factors influencing the learners' academic performance

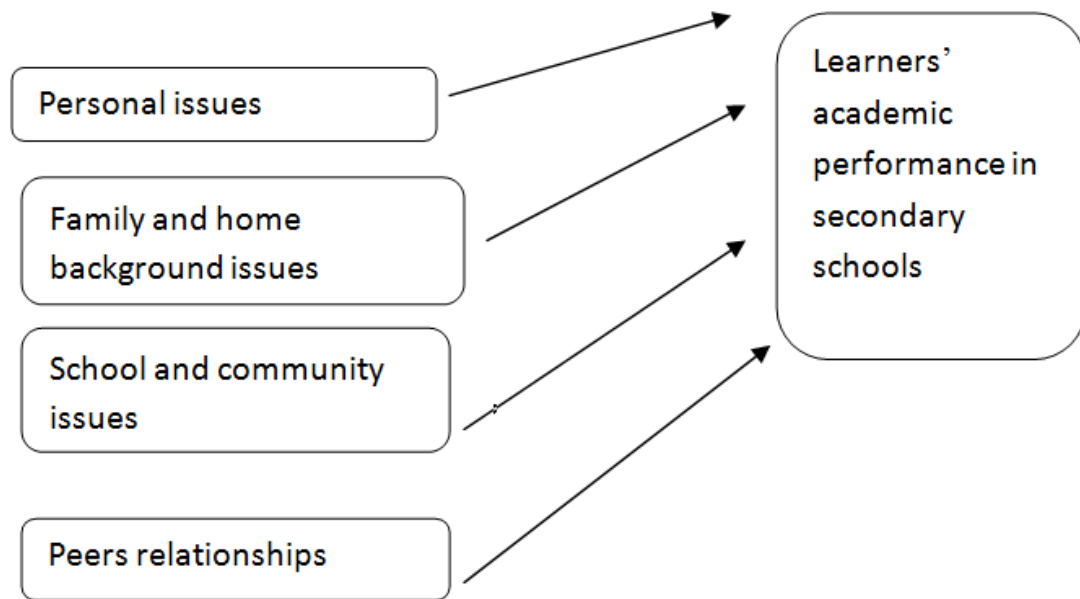


Figure 3: An illustration of summary of the psychosocial factors influencing the learners' academic performance from study findings from school X. (Source: researcher, 2018)

In a nutshell, Figure 3 illustrates that learner's academic performance in secondary schools in Malawi is affected by a number of issues. However, it is essential to know how each of the issues affects the learners in their academic performance. The subsequent sections provide more information.

4.3.1 Personal issues

The study found that there were several personal issues that affect the learners in their academic life which include discipline, mood, self-motivation, drug and substance abuse, and self-support. These personal issues will be discussed separately in their specific categories.

4.3.1.1 Discipline

The findings reveal that among the personal issues affecting the learners, discipline was one of the issues that influence learners' academic achievement. Table 7 below has more:

Table 7: Learners' perceptions on discipline as an influence on their academic performance

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
Agree	35	50.7	28	22.7
Disagree	20	29.0	8	21
Not sure	14	20.3	7	13.3
Total	69	100	43	57.0

Source: fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X).

In Table 7 above, statistics were generated from responses from the questionnaires. The figures indicate that there were three variations of learners' responses. The majority of learners agreed that discipline may have impact on the learners' academic life. The figures also show that about 28 % of boys and 22.3 % of girls agreed that discipline affected learners' school attendance. The responses may mean that discipline positively or negatively impact on their academic life and performance. Secondly, it may mean that the some are aware and convinced that discipline has an impact on the learners' academic performance. This assertion confirms Bronfenbrenner's theory which asserts that the individual and their issues contribute to their development and academic performance. On the other hand, there is a group that is not sure whether discipline affects performance of a learner with figures showing 7 % boys and 13.3 % girls. Secondly, it is noticed that a lower number of boys represented by 8 % and 21 % of girls disagreed that discipline affect their

academic performance. This indicates that there are different perceptions on what one thinks affect them or not in their academic performance.

There are some implications of these findings. The general comment is that discipline could be a factor that affects learner performance in this school. Only the minority perceive that discipline affect their academic experience and performance. Some learners are aware and others are not aware of whether discipline affects them. Interviews gave explanation of how learners perceive that discipline affect their academic experiences and performance.

Interview results also gave evidence that shows that discipline affects learners' academic life. Teacher 1 reported, "A rude student may end up losing teacher cooperation and support in academic issues which may read to student failure" (31 July, 2017, school X). On the same, learner 1 reported, "When one learner is rude and verbally challenges a teacher, it leads to loss of time and change in the momentum of lesson progress' (31 July, 2017, school X).

It is noticeable from the reports that indiscipline affects the learners. Indiscipline students may lose contact with teaching hours and interaction with teachers and fellow learners. On the other hand, indiscipline conduct may also affect disciplined learners like in the case when an offended teacher chooses to punish all learners because of one learner. It leads to waste of time and contact with subject matter and teachers' assistance. So, discipline is good and could affect academic performance positively. In the same way, indiscipline could lead to negative effects on academic performance of the learners.

In other studies, such as Chazema (2007), it showed that learner issues such as discipline have a bearing on the learners' academic life. Chazema explained that discipline encompass many issues which may include; absconding classes and lessons, breach of school rules and regulations, noise-making, going out of school boundaries, teasing and bullying, smoking and drinking beer, sexual relationships within the school either that involving a teacher and learner, or between a learner and learner just to mention a few. She attributed the cause and effect of such indiscipline to lack or low levels of interest to lessons and school. So, discipline or indiscipline can cause learners interest to school and lessons, and to academic life in general. Other studies (Engeberg, Morral, & King, 2006) concur with this study that indiscipline fosters negative impact on the learners' academic performance.

4.3.1.2 Mood

In the findings, mood was found to be one of personal issues that affects the learners. The study indicates that mood was one of the personal issues that influence learners' academic achievement. Statistics evidence generated from questionnaires indicates that mood is an influential factor in the learners' academic performance. However, there are different views by learners regarding this. Table 8 below has details.

Table 8: Learners' perceptions on mood as an influence on their academic performance

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
Agree	34	48.6	21	27.6
Disagree	17	24.3	8	16.3
Not sure	19	27.1	13	14.1
Total	70	100	42	58

Source: fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X).

Table 8 shows that 21 % of boys and 27.6 % of girls agreed that learners are affected by mood. This finding confirms Bronfenbrenner's theory assertion that the individuals and their issues contributes to their development and academic performance. Here, mood has been identified as an individual's personal factor that affects his development and academic performance. However, there is a group that disagree that mood affects learners' academic performance. Descriptive statistics show that 8 % of boys and 16.3 % of girls disagreed to the fact that mood affects learners' school attendance. The statistics in the figure shows that more girls than boys perceive that mood affects learners' academic performance. There are also a good number of learners whose response shows they are not sure whether mood affects learners' academic performance or not. The figures show that 13 % of boys and 14.1 % of girls were not sure that mood affects their school attendance. Interviews results explain why some learners consider that mood affect their and why some do not think they are affected by mood in their academic performance.

Findings from interview results added more personal issues that can affect the learner in his/her academic performances. This is what Learner 3 reported:

Within school, activities such as disco and variety show raise hype within the learners. For the students who want to study within the school, they are emotionally anxious to attend, so they lose interest in studying, as well as while these activities are going on, they fail to concentrate on their studying (31 July, 2017, school X).

In the same interview, Learner 4 reported, “Disappointments make learners lose interest in that the mind keeps getting out /off to the reasons /cause of disappointment” (31 July, 2017, school X).

The findings showed that some environmental factors contribute towards mood swings which in turn affect the learners’ academic experiences and performance. Adesola & Li (2018) in an ethnography learnt that learners’ emotions play an important part indeed in the learners’ behaviour in class as well as during tests. If the learners have good mood (positive emotions), they are more likely concentrating on their academic activities and possibly they can have good performance.

This assertion confirms Bronfenbrenner’s theory assertion that the individuals and their issues contributes to their development and academic performance. Here, more evidence has been added to support the claim that mood has been identified as an individual’s personal factor that affects his development and academic performance.

4.3.1.3 Self-Motivation

The findings showed that learner factors such as learners’ personal motivation as a contributor to learners’ academic performance. Learner 5 reported, “our goals, which

we have set ourselves push us to work very hard so we achieve our dreams, and to work hard in some subjects though they are difficult such as Mathematics and Biology,' (31 July, 2017, school X).

Headteacher/teachers/learners in separate interviews concurred that learners at that school were interested in their education by reporting for school, attending classes and lessons regularly. Some of these learners want to become medical doctors, laboratory technicians, engineers of different types, botanists just to mention a few. The claims above confirm Bronfenbrenner's theory assertion that the individuals and their issues contribute to their development and academic performance. Here, self-motivation has been added on the list of some possible individuals' personal factors that affect learners' academic performance.

The implications of the findings are that learners can naturally have interest to learn, and in particular subjects. Stakeholders can use this natural interest to create most effective programs, methods and activities that lead to high academic performance. A study by Mbugua et.al. (2012) in Kenya showed the same results which agree with the above learners' claims that favourable attitude towards subjects lead to high achievement. It can also be the case that low attitudes towards a subject lead to low achievements.

4.3.1.4 Self-financing

However, there was also a scenario whereby learners support themselves financially. Statistics show that 24 % boys and 29 % girls are on self-funding. The claims above confirm Bronfenbrenner's theory assertion that the individuals and their issues contribute to their development and academic performance. In this case, self-

financing has been added on the list of some possible individuals' personal factors that affect learners' academic performance.

The study did not go further to uncover the ways in which the learners source funds to support themselves because this factor was captured by closed question in a questionnaire. The statistics doesn't establish whether the self-supporting learners are wholly independent financially, or they partly contribute towards their financial needs. The idea of learners' self-support could account for some of the learners staying and finishing their education. However, a study by Warren (2003) suggested that there's no evidence that high school employment has either short term or long term effects on grades in the academic courses. In this instance, if the learners' self-financing makes them stay in school, it means there is a positive influence on academic performance.

In conclusions, findings and discussions above show that there is evidence to support the claims that learners' personal issues (discipline, mood, self-motivation, self-funding) can influence their academic performance. In addition, the findings corroborate with Bronfenbrenner's theory assertions.

4.3.2 Family and home background issues

The study found out that family and home background contribute towards a learners' academic life although some disagree and others are not sure. This claim is supported by reports from the descriptive statistical figures below.

Table 9: Learners' perceptions on family and home background as influence of academic performance

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Fem ale
Agree	28	38.3	18	20.3
Disagree	33	45.2	14	31.2
Not sure	12	16.4	11	5.5
Total	73	100	43	57

Source: fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X)

Table 9 above indicates that less than 50 % of all learners (18% boys and 20.3 % girls) agree that family and home background factors contribute to the learners' academic life. In addition, some learners admitted that 11 % boys and 5.5 % girls representing 16.4 % of all learners were not sure whether family and home background have any contribution to their academic life or not. However, the table also indicates that 45.1 % of all learners (14% boys and 31.2 % girls) disagreed on the fact that family and home background factors contribute to the learners' academic life. Mbugua, et. al (2012) as well as Chukuemeka (2013) also learnt that home background affected academic performance of students. This evidence helps in identifying family and home background issues that have contribution towards the learners' academic performance. The statistics also show that more girls than boys agree that family and home factors contribute to the learners' academic factors. The majority of girls, 20.3 % who perceive that family give them support echo what Dimbisso (2011) study showed. Dimbisso study had also found that girl students' perception that parental lack of support contributed towards girls passing and motivation to go to next levels of education compared to support that would surely be given to boys. The

implication of these findings is that parents must pay attention to the needs of their children, especially girls. Children look up to their parents or guardians.

The findings in this study have several implications. These figures show the possibility that some learners have perceived that family and home background issues do not have direct relationship to their academic performance. Bronfenbrenner advocated for acknowledgement that children's development occurs largely due to the interaction between the individual and many different individuals and systems within his/her environment. Firstly, family and home background is explicitly mentioned in acknowledging the fact that the individual develop within multiple social contexts within the environment. These multiple social contexts within the environment are referred to as the systems. The family is found in the micro-system (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). The micro-system, in which the family and home background lies, is considered one of the closest to the individual. As such, it contributes to the everyday undertakings of the individual. The findings in this study reaffirm the claims made by the theory that the family is one of the actors in the environment that contributes towards child development and academic performance.

The study tried to understand how family can contribute to the learners' academic performance. The study findings show that the family and home background is mainly responsible for financial provision. This means learners' welfare is mainly met by the family. Statistical results from questionnaires show that parents/guardians and siblings are main actors from family and home that contribute largely to the learners' academic life. Table 10 gives some evidence on the above claim.

Table 10: Learners' perception on main actors on their financial needs

Type of response	Self		Parents		Friends		Community	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	35	45.5	28	38.4	14	19	3	4.1
No	42	54.5	45	61.6	59	80.8	70	95.9
Total	77	100	73	100	73	100	73	100

Source: fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X)

The figures indicate that more boys and girls are financially supported by their parents and guardians. Although, it also appears that more girls than boys enjoy parental and guardian support than boys. The table also shows that there are extra support measures like bursary and self-support mechanisms. This finding serves to explain one way in which family and home background issues as environmental factors in Bronfenbrenner's theory contribute towards the child's development and academic performance.

In addition, the family and home background is the source of technical support.

Learner 6 reported, "When we are given home-work, they are many different people who support me. It varies according to availability of the person(s), level of difficult and willingness of the person to support." (31 July, 2017, school X).

Learner 7 reported, "I am assisted by my siblings (brothers and sisters). Of course there are sometimes when friends assist me." (31 July, 2017, school X).

In addition, Learner 8 reported, "grandparents that I live with, assist me with school work." She added, "It depends on their willing to assist but they are mostly not available in good time." (31 July, 2017, school X).

The findings imply many things. There are many several key holders in the family and home background of the learners such as parents, grandparents, siblings and others. Their impacts vary according to each category. Parents are main providers with finances and materials. On the other hand, all these state holders assist in technical and moral support. It means quality support system may explain the academic experience and performance.

The evidence reaffirms Bronfenbrenner's theory that the immediate actor, the family, contributes a lot to the child. It also serves to explain further how family and home background issues contribute towards learners' academic performance. This is affirmed in other studies done in Malawi such as Chimombo et al. (2000). Chimombo et al. established that home-based factors such as presence of parents in the home are an important family and home background factor in the learners' academic life. Here, it shows that parental unavailability may affect learners' academic performance negatively. Chimombo et al. (2000) also indicated that the level of the education of a parent may matter in a learners' life.

The findings about family's willingness and practically assisting the learners with their school work are supported by further findings on parents and guardians' level of qualification. The study claims that it is only possible for the parents to assist with homework if they reached the secondary school educational level or went further than the current educational level. Statistics show that 10 % of the parents and guardians had reached primary school level, 52 % had reached secondary school level, and 40 % had reached tertiary level of education. However, the study did not specifically distinguish between reaching a level and qualifying at that level. It is not clear

whether the statistics mean the parents and guardians reached or attained that level. Table 11 gives evidence about parents/guardians' highest level of qualifications segregated by gender.

Table 11: Highest level of qualification of learners' parents/guardians

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
Primary	8	9.8	4	5.8
Secondary	41	50.0	24	26
Tertiary	33	40.2	11	29.2
Total	82	100	39	61

Source: fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X)

Table 11 indicates that the majority of the learners' parents/guardians reached the secondary school level and. The statistical information is supported by interview results. Learner 10 reported, "I stay with many people in my home. I am assured of some kind of technical support from either, grandparents, parents and siblings in my class homework." (31 July, 2017, school X).

Again, the report helps to explain Bronfenbrenner's theory assertions that the immediate actor, the family, contributes a lot to the child. It also serves to explain further how family and home background issues contribute towards learners' academic performance.

In the studies of Schiller, et. al (2002), it was established that parents who had more education levels are perceived to provide their children with academic and social support more. This ensures the possibility that the parents have some basic knowledge

about the subject matter in question. In addition, the parents/guardians highest attainments may act as inspiration and encouragement to the learners. Baron and Brascombe (2014) had suggested that the learners' physical, home and family environment influences the feelings, thoughts and behaviour of the learners. The studies by Oselumese, Omoike, & Andrew, (2016) in Kenya agrees to the assertion that family background affects learners' academic performance, especially as it either motivates or de-motivates the learners in their studies.

The study also found out that there are other ways that family assists their wards. It was learnt that mothers show care by preparing meals, monitoring and evaluating their studying within the home. Learner 9 said, "My mother sometimes set my alarm, woke me up, and makes sure that I am studying, and not going back to sleep." (31 July, 2017, school X).

Another learner concurred with her friend and added, "My mother wakes her up early so that she prepares and go to school in good time." (31 July, 2017, school X).

Furthermore, the study found that family monitors and evaluates learners' academic progress. In addition, there is corroboration between parents and the school in monitoring the learners' academic performance. The study learnt this from Learner 3 who reported, "My parents check my notebooks, and meet with my teachers." While laughing, she added, "... some parents and guardians also go to the extent of following up by phone with teachers to check on the children's welfare." (31 July, 2017, school X).

On the same, headteacher reported,

The school organises a day when parents collect learners' progress reports in person once processing of examinations results is done. This system allows the parents and school management team to interact. Family has a privilege to learn more about their children. The teachers are available, ready and willing to interact with guardians. (01 August, 2017, school X).

The interview results above support the statistic results by explaining what some percentages and the frequencies indicate on how parents/guardians monitor their academic progress. Results show that most parents representing 79 % monitor their wards progress, 17.3 % sometimes do so, and 3.7 % rarely monitor their wards' academic performance. Table 12 segregated by gender show the trends in which boys and girls enjoy support from their parents and guardians.

Table 12: Learners' perceptions on their parents/guardians frequency in monitoring of learners' progress

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mostly	71	94.7
Some	3	4.0
Rarely	1	1.3
Total	75	100

Source: Fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X)

The figures in Table 12 clearly indicate that both boys and girls fairly enjoy the same trends of monitoring and evaluation of their academic progress. The majority of the boys and girls are mostly monitored by their parents/guardians. Some of the boys and girls are monitored and evaluated by their parents and guardians. Some learners are

rarely observed by their guardians/parents. It was established during interviews with learners, teachers and the headteacher that the school makes sure that all the parents and guardians get their children's school reports. During the interview, Learner 7 reported, "I enjoy it when my parents and guardians monitor my academic progress either through coming here at school, or calling my teachers. They are able to advise and assist me." (31 July, 2017, school X).

In Bronfenbrenner's exo-system (McDevitt & Ormorod, 2004), the findings give some examples in which two or more systems or environments interact in the interest of a child and contribute towards the development of a child. There is evidence about the interaction between the school and the family. There are two areas mentioned; parent-teacher interaction in discipline, parent-school interaction in monitoring academic progress. In passing, the headteacher also mentioned about the school management meetings involving some of the parents. The learners' sentiments that they liked the teacher-parent interactions, especially on monitoring progress solidify the observations and theory.

The findings above concur with Gage (2006) who made the observations that family and school are partners in children learning as such they cannot afford to work in isolation. Gage's observation underscored the findings on teacher-parent interaction. The study by Gage (2006) established that family, school and community are partners in children' learning, such that they should not work in isolation but corroborate in all efforts in the children's education matters.

The implication of the study findings is that there has to be a system to promote the interaction between teachers and guardians. In addition, effective interactions between

teachers and guardians will enhance the benefits of such practices. On quality corroboration, McDevitt & Ormorod (2004) had concluded that only effective communication between parents and teachers is important. This can be done through meetings, phone calls, e-mails and others.

Gauvain & Cole (2009) had also underscored the importance of parental monitoring, signifying the efforts of parents to keep informed about and set limits on their children's activities outside the home. Parents and guardians are resource persons in monitoring and evaluation of learners' academic progress. Adeyemo (2007) argued that students with parental involvement in their academic education tend to have better academic performance and are not likely to drop out of school, unlike their counterparts. Therefore, some of the learners' situation predicts a possibility of getting high passes in their academic performance.

On the negative side, findings reveal that family problems such as lack of resources and quarrels affect the learners' emotional well-being. As such, learners may spend important time on worrying than concentrating on academic activities that may in turn affect academic achievement too. Teachers and learners reported that home problems keep the learners worrying while in class and lessons. Previously, Baron and Brascombe (2014) established that some factors such as home and family environments influence learners' feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Therefore, people should be responsible in improving such aspects positively to eradicate their negative influence.

The study went further to find out the socio-economic backgrounds of the learners for the sake of comprehensive knowledge on the home and background conditions of the

learners in the study. Descriptive statistics show that almost all the learners' home had an asset of some sort. Statistics indicated that over 70 % of the learners' family and homes possessed land for farming, of which 30 % are males and 40 % are females , 26 % learners' homes possessed cars , of which 3 % represent males and 11 % represent females., 18 % possess bicycles of which 8 % represent males and 10 % represent females. There is evidence to claim that the majority of the learners came from family and homes that have land for farming. However, it is not known whether this land is used for commercial purposes or not. It is also known that both boys and girls enjoy community support in terms of being beneficiaries of bursaries. The implication of such findings is that some of the learners in this school can be socio-economically supported through the resources their homes possess.

Bronfenbrenner succeeded in outlining the many different actors in the systems and environment that surround and assist the child and learners. Bronfenbrenner did not describe the ideal characteristics of the backgrounds. The findings above describe the background of the respondents in this study. It is relevant in this study to provide knowledge that assist in understanding the potentials of the homes. It adds to the assertion that different environments may produce different quality children or academic performance because of the availability and absence of the resources.

4.3.3 School and Community issues

The study found out that school and community issues contribute towards learners' education performance. Descriptive statistics from the learners' questionnaire response show that there are three different perceptions on whether school and

community contribute towards the learners' academic performance. Table 13 shows these figures.

Table 13: Learners' perceptions on school as an influence on academic performance

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
Agree	24	33.4	12	21.4
Disagree	33	45.8	19	26.8
Not sure	15	20.8	12	8.8
Total	72	100	43	57

Source: fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X)

Table 13 shows that there are three different responses to the question whether the learners consider that school is an important factor in learners' academic performance. Here, it shows that 12% males and 21.4 % females agreed that school is an important factor. Whilst as 19 % males and 26.8 % females disagree to the opinion that school plays an important role in their academic factor. However, 12 % males and 8.8 % females were not sure. The highest responses came from the learners (males and females) that disagree that school contributes to their academic performance.

According to Bronfenbrenner, the school is found in the micro-system which is one of the closest social contexts within the learners' environment (McDevitt & Ormorod, 2009). As such, it influences the everyday undertakings in the learners' life. Again, the findings of the study affirm the assertions made by the theory.

The statistics results discussed above are supported by interview results. The report from interviews show that there are many school issues that influence learners' academic performance. The headteacher reported, "The school prestige plays an important role in the academic activities. The history of the school's performance encourages the learners to work hard. The perception is that if some old timers achieved a lot at this school, therefore I can do it." (31 July, 2017, school X). On the same, the headteacher added,

Some learners are attracted to come to school by the school facilities such as sports kits and activities and leagues at school. Since sports activities take place after lessons, they are forced to attend and stay in school so that they are allowed to participate in sport activities thereafter. (01 August, 2017, school X).

Bronfenbrenner's idea of a chronological system has impact too. In this study, it was learnt that history motivates learners to work hard so that they achieve the same or more. Others had additional perceptions. Teacher 4 said,

There are other extracurricular activities such as clubs and societies. Students are encouraged to remain in school so that they participate in the meetings. But their attendance in school and class allows them to attend lessons thereby getting knowledge. All these activities attract school management support in finance and expertise. (31 July, 2017, school X).

In the study by Chimombo et al. (2000), it was also established that school features such as sports, places and incentives motivate learners in their education practices.

The study further found from learners that teachers' attitudes and behaviours contribute to the learners' academic performance. Learner 8 said, "Some teachers use examples or cases that make learners feel inferior. It embarrasses us and makes us

uncomfortable during such lessons. ' (31 July, 2017, school X). In addition, Learner 2 said, there are some teachers who hold a grudge against learners. Such attitudes affect the learner-teacher relationship. She added, "Some teachers are cruel, for example, teachers painting a learner's face with dry chalk dust. Such treatments make us uncomfortable and we lose interest in the lesson. (31 July, 2017, school X).

In a study by Chimombo et al. (2000) also that established that teacher behaviours and attitudes in school and classroom they affect the learners' academic performance. Chimombo et al. (2000) agree to teaching and learning methodologies, communication and materials among other factors that affect learners during the lesson within the school environment. On the extreme, some learners complained that love relationships between learners and teachers. The teachers' interest to have love/sexual relationship with their learners affects the learners' attendance to school and classes. The learners who are proposed to are afraid to face the teacher concerned in class.

The study also found that availability and use of instructional materials and facilities contribute towards the learners' academic performance. The headteacher indicated, "The school management makes efforts to procure teaching, learning and other resources. (01, August, 2017, school X). But teachers and learners had different views on availability and use of teaching and learning resources in some aspects. For instance, Teacher 5 said, "In most cases, resources are few. There are few textbooks, chemicals in the laboratory and others" (31 July, 2017, school X).

All learners added,

“Sometimes we fail to conduct experiments in the laboratories due to lack or less provisions of chemicals and substances in the laboratories. In such cases, chemicals and other resources are reserved for use during mock and national examinations” (31 July, 2017, school X).

The learners’ concerns were that lack of practice under-prepares them for excellence during national examinations. The study by Kanyerere (2008) also revealed that availability and lack of instructional materials contribute to learner’s achievement.

The study also found that type of subjects affect the learners’ performance in a subject. All learners echoed, “Some subjects are difficult e.g. Mathematics, Biology, Chichewa and Physical Science. It varies from one learner to the other. As such, they influence their choice, attendance, participation and performance.” (31 July, 2017, school X). All Teachers added, “The perceived difficult subjects such as Mathematics, Physical Science, Biology, have difficult concepts as such they repel the learners. At senior level, most learners drop-out of these subjects.’ (31 July, 2017, school X). Furthermore, the headteacher said, “The government policies and practices observed with the SMASSE create attitudes and biases.” (31 July, 2017, school X). All teachers lamented,

“Some government policies like SMASSE created subject biases. So it encourages learners to put more effort on these subjects than the humanities and the language subjects, in the end, learners perform better in some subjects than others.” (31 July, 2017, school X).

The theory's idea of macro-system as an environmental aspect where rules or laws also attributed to contributions towards a learners development and academic performance is affirmed.

In the study by Kadzamira & Rose (2001), it was observed that sometimes there is a mismatch between policies and practices. In addition, a study by Leach, Zomeran, Zebel, Vliek (2008) established that policy and practices meet challenges when they were not all-inclusive of different stakeholders in the formulation process. However, Leach et al suggested that an all-inclusive approaches to policy formulation assist in dispelling subject biases.

The implications on this factor are that school issues can positively and negatively affect the learners. Some issues like teaching and learning materials are essential for learning. Their absence denies learners' capacity to learn which in turn contribute towards a learner's academic performance. Similarly, the availability of materials would have positive academic outcome. The study concludes that school contributes to the academic performance because some learners responded positively to that although it cannot be generalised that it is a significant factor.

4.3.4 Peer Relationships

The study findings show that peer-relations that exist among learners affect the learners' academic performance. There are various ways in which peers assist each other in their lives. Descriptive statistical results from learners' questionnaire indicate that learners have many friends and from different spheres with more friends at school than elsewhere reporting 35 % males and 68 % females. It means more girls have

friends in school than elsewhere. In addition, about 45.5 % of the learners reported having chosen the friends themselves, 38.4% reported their parents influenced their choice, while 19.2 % were influenced by their friends, and 4.1 % reported that it was the community that influenced their decision on the choice of friends.

The findings above concur with the study by Papalia & Mortorell (2014) who observes that peer acceptance can influence the behaviour and in turn influence learners' academics of the adolescents. Also, Morris and Mastro (2007) indicated that peers are capable of forming cliques (groups of adolescents) with similar interests and strong mutual attachments which can either be positive or negative. The availability of high numbers of friendships is supported by the study of Tope (2011) which indicates that the trends of high peer relationship influences are more common among adolescents. In addition, Shin (2007) was very clear that peer influence usually occur between and among the peers who are interacting, not by distance. Table 14 below shows statistics that indicate different responses on peer relationships and academic performance from the learners.

Table 14: Learners' perceptions on peer relationships as an influence on academic performance

Type of response	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
Agree	22	31.9	12	19.9
Disagree	29	42.0	19	23
Not sure	18	26.1	22	4.1
Total	69	100		

Source, fieldwork, (31 July, 2017, school X)

The statistics above show that some learners at this school agree, others disagree and some are not sure whether peers contribute towards their academic performance. Highest number of males, representing 22% was not sure whether peers contribute to their academic performance or not. On the other hand, lowest number of girls, representing 4.1% was not sure whether academic performance is affected by peers in their lives. However, the good number indicate that they are not sure that their peers influence their academic performance (18 % not sure, 29 % disagree, and 22% agree). There are differences in small margins. Learners at this school perceive that peers influence their academic performance though this is not a majority view. Bronfenbrenner advocated for acknowledgement that children's development occurs largely due to the interaction between the individual and many different individuals and systems within his/her environment. According to Bronfenbrenner, peers are in the meso-system, as such, it is among the closest social context or ecosystem within the learners' environment.

The study findings agree with the study by Chukuemeka (2013) showed that positive interrelationships, especially within school environment can increase achievement levels. The study by Kaphesi (2008), while indicating that learners' relationships enhance academic achievements through group work, it also found out that peer impact differs between males and females which are not far from what the statistics has shown on the different response rates between boys and girls.

The findings also show that peers are a source of encouragement. Interview report shows that there are many ways through which friends shower encouragement to each other. All learners concurred,

Some friends encourage you, through provision of guidance and counselling.” they added, “However, there are some friends whose responses are discouraging, comments like; you are difficult to assist, all this time I have been helping you and you say, yet you do not understand (31 July, 2017, school X).

In addition, learner 3 personally said, “Some friends are role-models. There are some friends who have excellent academic performance. You admire their achievements and work very hard so that you can do well like them.” (31 July, 2017, school X). On the same, learner 6 said, “Some friends are a source of information. Some friends share with others their books and other reading materials like pamphlets and class notes.” (31 July, 2017, school X). However, Teacher 1 said,

Some learners are very helpful as mentors to their friends. There was a girl who was very troublesome. She used to stay away from school, dressed badly, smoke and drink at night (learnt from her parents) and academically performed badly too. When several attempts like suspension and guidance and counselling failed, she was paired with another girl (well-behaving plus with excellent performance. Some later months, we noticed positive behaviour and academic performance. (31 July, 2017, school X).

The statements above show the significance of the peers in the learners’ life and academic experiences. It is learned both from the learners and the teacher that learners perceive that they can benefit as well as lose track in their academic experiences with their peers. The major implication of the study findings is that peers are important in the learners’ academic life. The quality peer groups, resources and activities can enhance the benefits of peer relationships. Bronfenbrenner’ theory says peers are an important aspect in children’s life. The interview reports explained some ways in which children or learners’ assist one another either positively or negatively. According to Pastrana & Battle (2007) studies, positive peer relationships contribute towards positive learners academic achievements, while negative peer relationships

contributes towards negative learners' academic achievements. As such, as Strong et al. in Woolfolk (2007) emphasised, stakeholders must foster peer relationships for peer success in academic life. This was echoed by Blumenfeld et. al. (cited in Woolfolk (2007) who added that learners small work groups have potential to effect positive change in learners' attitudes towards school as well as transforming learners' experiences. However, positive peer influence is not universal. Pellegrinni and Blatchford (2000) established that only quality peer relationships contribute towards quality benefits, and the more the better. All this informs education stakeholders to consider encouraging positive peer groups programs in view of promoting high academic performance.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study have been presented and discussed. The findings showed that the two research questions were answered by identifying and explaining psychosocial factors that influence the learners' academic performance in secondary school. The findings show that there are several factors that affect learners in academic performance. The responses range from the categories of personal, family and home background, school, to peers relationships. The learners' personal category issues like; discipline, mood, self-motivation, and self-financing. These are issues that the learners, teachers and headteacher's perceived are issues that affect the learners' academic behaviour leading to either low or high academic performance. Home background factors include; financing, socio-economic, qualifications and frequency in monitoring and evaluations of children academic performance. Again, these perceptions came from learners, teachers and the headteacher. School and community factors include issues like; teachers' attitude and behaviour, school prestige,

extracurricular activities like clubs and societies, teachers' attitudes and behaviour, teaching and learning resources, and implementation of national policies. On the other hand, peer issues include issues like; support, technical assistance, modelling, and mentorship. Even the above contribution was learnt from the learners, teachers and the headteacher.

The findings also indicate that generally, these factors are responsible for learners' interest in their school by reporting, attendance and participation in lessons, motivation and consistency in working hard, corporation in study and extracurricular activities, monitoring and evaluation of academic progress. Of which, largely, they lead to positive academic performance. There are some areas that also need improvement. In the next chapter, there's a presentation of conclusions, implications and suggested areas for further study. On the other hand, the Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has been shown to be relevant in this case study. It has been demonstrated that the theory apply in showing that the learner and his/her environment are essential in the development of the learner, especially in education, as well as the process and interactions that exist within the social contexts in the learners' environment in Malawi.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTED AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a summary of the study's findings; conclusions made on study findings, implications of the study findings and suggested areas for further study.

5.2 Conclusions

According to the findings and discussions on psychosocial factors that influence learners' academic performance, some conclusions can be made.

Firstly, the study indicated that there are many different psychosocial factors that affect the learners in their academic performance. In a questionnaire and interview, at least some learners agreed that to each psychosocial factor that it affected them; personal (discipline 50.7 % & mood 48.6 %), family and background 38.3 %, school 33.4 % & peers 31.9 %. In the school, there were many learners. And different learners identified different psychosocial factors that affect them. As such, those factors were essentials in their lives.

Secondly, there was no universal psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance. There was this range in percentage in learners' perceptions; personal (discipline 50.7 % & mood 48.6 %), family and background 38.3 %, school 33.4 % & peers 31.9 %. Statistics show that only personal factors affect the majority of the learners' and the least is peer relationships. Therefore, there is a possibility that one

learner may be affected with one factor, whilst the other learner(s) can be affected with other factor(s). It shows that no one factor is singularly responsible for the learners' academic performance.

Thirdly, some learners' are aware of psychosocial factors that affect their academic performance. There were three variation of responses; agree, disagree and not sure. These were reflections from individual learners that showed subjectivity. The learners that expressed agreement and disagreement positively show that that are aware of what is true or not about them. On the other hand, the learners that indicated that they were not sure demonstrate that they are not aware of what is true on not about themselves. As such, maybe efforts must be made to improve on the learners' self-awareness which would in turn boost learners' self-esteem and self- worth.

Fourthly, the psychosocial factors are for motivation of learners' in their academic life. The learners' motivation vary from interest in their school through reporting, attendance and participation in lessons, working hard, cooperation in study and extracurricular activities, monitoring and evaluation of academic progress. Of which, largely, they can lead to positive academic performance if universally available.

5.3 Implications

There are some implications that can be derived from the findings from the study.

Firstly, the study findings provide evidence that there are many possible psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance in secondary school. The study also showed that one psychosocial factor does not affect everyone. Although such variations in perceptions is the case, it does not deny the existence and effect of the

psychosocial factors on the learners' academic performance. Such knowledge informs decision-makers on priorities and approaches in designing interventions in policy making and implementation to improve learners' academic performance in secondary schools to control unsatisfactory pass rates.

Secondly, the study findings add to the body of knowledge in the academic field. The study succeeded in identifying some psychosocial factors that affect learners in academic performance at a selected school. Such information could be used as a background on which more studies on psychosocial factors that affect learners' academic performance in secondary schools can depart from.

The study used the case study design. The findings are reflections of the conditions in this study area. There is a limitation that generalisation is not possible to all secondary schools in Malawi. However, it can be applied elsewhere where desired.

5.5 Suggested areas for further study

The findings showed that there are many psychosocial factors that influence learners in their academic performance. It does not show which is the most or least factor influencing the learners' academic performance. The study was mostly interested with the finding about mentorship between learners and learners in this study. Therefore, the study would like to suggest the following areas for further study;

- A correlation study is needed in order to find out the factors that most and least influence the learners' academic performance in secondary schools.
- A replication of the study to other secondary schools, other types of secondary schools, or different levels of education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter of introduction from Chancellor College



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

Principal: Richard Tambulasi,
B.A. (Pub Admin), BPA (Hon), MPA, Ph.D

P. O. Box 280, Zomba, MALAWI
Tel: (265) 01 524 222
Telex: 44742 CHANCOL MI
Fax: (265) 01 524 046

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

11th March 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR MASTER OF EDUCATION (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY)

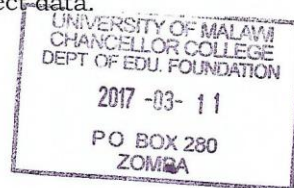
Ms. Chisomo Veronica Ekesi (MED/PSY/13/13) is a student of Education in the Department of Education Foundations at Chancellor College, University of Malawi.

She is working on her thesis titled, "*Investigating the Psychological Factors that Influence Learners Academic Performance among Students in Secondary Schools in Malawi.*"

This is meant to be a request to your institution or organization to assist our student in her endeavor to collect data.

Thank you

F. MTEMANG'OMBE, PhD
HEAD EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS DEPARTMENT



Appendix 2: Learners' questionnaire

I am a student pursuing a **MASTERS DEGREE IN EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY AT CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**. As a requirement of the program, I am obliged to conduct a research. My research topic is on **The Psychosocial Factors That Influence Learners Academic Performance in Malawi**". I am collecting data from teachers and learners in your school using questionnaires. You have been selected to participate in the study by responding to the questionnaire.

I, therefore, seek your consent to respond to this questionnaire. All the information collected will be treated with outmost confidentiality, and used for this purpose only.

Signature for consent:

Instructions:

- i. Answer all questions
- ii. Indicate your response to all questions by following the guide for each question.

SECTION A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Please fill in the table below)

S / N	I T E M	R E S P O N S E	
1	A g e (i n d i c a t e)		
2	Gender (tick appropriate)	M a l e	F e m a l e
3	No. of siblings (indicate no.)	Brothers	Sisters

SECTION B. FACTORS INFLUENCE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

1. In your opinion, what affects your lesson attendance? (TICK **THE BEST ALTERNATIVE**)

S/N	F a c t o r	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	M o o d					
2	Peer-relationship					
3	Family and home					
4	S c h o o l					
5	Distance from school					

2. In your opinion, what affects your interest in lessons? (**TICK THE BEST ALTERNATIVE**)

S/N	F a c t o r	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	M o o d					
2	D i s c i p l i n e					
3	Peer-relationship					
4	Family and home					
5	S c h o o l					
6	Distance from school					

3. In your view, what affects your loss of interest in lessons? Rank in order of highest (**TICK THE BEST ALTERNATIVE**)

S / N	F a c t o r	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	M o o d					
2	Peer-relationship					
3	Family and home					
4	S c h o o l					
5	Distance from school					

4. How often are you absent from classes? (**TICK THE BEST ALTERNATIVE**).

Factor	Never	Rarely	Often
Week			
Month			
T e r m			

5. How many friends do you have? (TICK **THE BEST ALTERNATIVE**).

Place /Number	0 - 5	6-10	11-15	16-20
A t h o m e				
A t s c h o o l				
In the community				
E l s e w h e r e				

6. Among the friends you have, who influenced the choice friendship?

TICK APPROPRIATE

Yourself	Parents	Friends	Community

7. In your opinion, your peers are a source of _____.

S/N	F a c t o r	Yes	No
1	Encouragement		
2	School finances		
3	School necessities		
4	Emotional security		
5	I n f o r m a t i o n		

8. What is the level of education of your parent/guardian? Tick appropriate)

N o n e	Primary school	Secondary school	Tertiary

9. Who is responsible for your financial commitments, in terms of school fees, items, etc.? Tick the most appropriate

Category	Mostly	Some	Few	None
Parents/guardians				
Bursary				
S e l f				

10. How often do parents/guardians monitor your academic performance? Tick most appropriate.

Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

11. What are the sources of income for your parents/guardians? Tick most appropriate, even more.

Subsistence Farming	Long term employment	Casual labour (ganyu)	Business

12. What are your family assets? Tick appropriate

Land for farming	C a r	B i k e

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix 3: Interview guide for the learners

I am a student pursuing a **MASTERS DEGREE IN EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY AT CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**. As a requirement of the program, I am obliged to conduct a research. My research topic is on **The Psychosocial Factors That Influence Learners Academic Performance in Malawi**". I am collecting data from teachers and learners in your school using questionnaires. You have been selected to participate in the study by participating in this interview.

I, therefore, seek your consent to respond to the questions. All the information collected will be treated with outmost confidentiality, and used for this purpose only.

Signature for consent:

1. A. What factors enable you to attend classes regularly?
B. What factors constrain your school or class attendance? (Probe for truancy and complete absence)
2. Have you ever lost interest, temporarily or permanently in any subject while studying alone or while attending a lesson?
3. If you have ever lost interest, what factors make you lose interest in the subjects?
 - a. While studying?
 - b. While attending lesson?
4. What subjects are of great interest to you? Why do you like them?
5. What factors make you have interest in these subjects? (probe on content, learning environment, teacher approach and mannerisms or attitude etc.)

6. Ordinarily, what do you do after classes? (probe for non-academic activities)
7. You have been given homework, who assist you?
8. A. How do friends contribute positively to your academic performance?
B. How do your friends limit your academic performance?
9. How do parents/guardians assist you in your academic work? (probe on financial, material and technical passport)
10. How do your parents or guardians monitor your school performance?

Appendix 4: Interview guide for teachers

I am a student pursuing a **MASTERS DEGREE IN EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY AT CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**. As a requirement of the program, I am obliged to conduct a research. My research topic is on **The Psychosocial Factors That Influence Learners Academic Performance in Malawi**". I am collecting data from teachers and learners in your school using questionnaires. You have been selected to participate in the study by participating in this interview.

I, therefore, seek your consent to respond to the questions. All the information collected will be treated with outmost confidentiality, and used for this purpose only.

Signature for consent:

1. Do your learners have interest in their education?
2. Describe average status of class attendance of your learners.
3. A. What factors account for high class attendances?
B. What factors account for truancy and absence of learners from school or classes?
4. In your observation, what accounts to your learners' loss of interest while attending your lessons?
5. In your observation, what accounts to learners' high interest in your lessons?
6. What are some of the activities organized for learners after classes?
7. Based on your observations, how friendships among learners shape their academic for good or worse?
8. How often do parents meet with school teachers to follow up on their children's academic performance? (probe on frequency, source of initiative)

Appendix 5: Interview guide for head teacher

I am a student pursuing a MASTERS DEGREE IN EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY AT CHANCELLOR COLLEGE. As a requirement of the program, I am obliged to conduct a research. My research topic is on The Psychosocial Factors That Influence Learners Academic Performance in Malawi". I am collecting data from teachers and learners in your school using questionnaires. You have been selected to participate in the study by participating in this interview by responding to the questionnaire.

I, therefore, seek your consent to respond to the questions. All the information collected will be treated with outmost confidentiality, and used for this purpose only.

Signature for consent:

1. Do your learners have interest in their education?
2. Describe average status of class attendance of your learners.
3. What factors account for high class attendances?
4. What factors account for truancy and absence of learners from school or classes?
5. In your observation, what accounts to your learners' loss of interest while attending your lessons?
6. In your observation, what accounts to learners' high interest in your lessons?
7. What are some of the activities organized for learners after classes?
8. Based on your observations, how friendships among learners shape their academic for good or worse?
9. How often do parents meet with school teachers to follow up on their children's academic performance? (Probe on frequency, source of initiative).