

**AN ASSESSMENT OF MOTHER GROUPS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE
RETENTION OF GIRLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF CHOZOLI
CLUSTER, BUMBA ZONE IN RUMPHI DISTRICT, MALAWI**

M.Ed. (POLICY, PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP) THESIS

JESSIE N. KAPOMBE

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

MAY 2024

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By

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Submitted to the Department of Education Foundations, School of Education, in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Policy,
Planning and Leadership)

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

MAY 2024

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been presented to any other institution for similar purposes. Acknowledgements have been made where other people's work has been used.

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Ken Ndala, PhD (Senior Lecturer)

Supervisor

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to all Mother Groups in Malawi for their efforts of eradicating the dire situation, a myriad different kinds of social, economic and cultural factors that are still encumber girls' education in Malawi. This work is also dedicated to all those that are working tirelessly in order to bring hope to girls' education through provision of both formal and technical education.

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ABSTRACT

Girl's school dropout remains a significant concern due to its profound socio-economic implications, impacting not only the well-being of girls but also a country's overall socio-economic development. In response, practitioners have implemented various strategies to mitigate dropout rates and enhance girls' retention in schools. However, the effectiveness of these strategies remains uncertain. This study aimed to evaluate the efficacy of Mother Groups in retaining girls in primary schools, utilizing a sample of 106 participants comprising representatives from Mother Groups, Teachers, Pupils currently enrolled in school, and Pupils who had previously dropped out. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining primary data collected through key informant interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions, with secondary data obtained through document analysis. Quantitative analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings indicate a positive perception of Mother Groups among teachers, pupils, school administrators, and community members. Additionally, Mother Groups displayed a favorable attitude towards girl's education and implemented various mechanisms to enhance retention. These mechanisms included establishing organizational structures, implementing regular training schedules, learning from successful Mother Groups, and fostering a conducive learning environment for adolescent girls. Moreover, the study revealed a positive correlation between these mechanisms and girl's retention rates. The presence of Mother Groups in primary schools demonstrates a promising potential to reduce dropout rates among girls. Ensuring the sustainability and functionality of Mother Groups is crucial, as is maintaining positive relationships between Mother Groups and other school stakeholders. This study underscores the importance of continued support for initiatives aimed at promoting girl's education and retention in schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides the background to this study. This background puts the study in context by relating the study to existing literature and programmes. The chapter also has a statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations and limitations of the study, and finally a chapter summary.

1.2 Background to the study

Globally, many stakeholders, including professional teachers, professional teacher organizations, international association of social educators and academicians in higher education are concerned with the problem of high rates of primary school dropout. The problem is particularly concerning because the dropout rates are higher among girls than boys (Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2000-2018). This means that girls in some areas are at a greater risk of not completing primary school. According to a UNICEF (2018) report, millions of girls around the world fail to enrol for or to complete their primary education. This failure of girls to complete primary education is a key concern which has received international attention for the past two decades. That is the reason the international community has heightened efforts to deal with the situation by, among others, implementing global goals, such as achieving universal primary education; education for all; and promote gender equality and quality education (UN, 2015a and UNESCO, 2017a). As part of this agenda, 189 countries, including Malawi, ratified the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy and Free Primary School policy. This has resulted in remarkable progress, particularly, in primary school enrolment between 1994 and 2000.

Although it is statistically indicated that worldwide, over 40 million children were enrolled in primary school between 2000 and 2015, a 2015 report by UNESCO found that 18% of those who enrolled at the primary school level dropped out. Girls constituted the largest proportion of those who dropped out with the majority (60 million) coming from Sub-Saharan countries, including Malawi. With regard to Malawi, the Malawi

Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) of 2010 to 2019 shows that an estimated 2.4 million children are growing up in violent homes, witness domestic violence and experience its negative impact. Additionally, it is estimated that almost half of all females have experienced violence before the age of 18 years and 20% of females experience sexual violence before the age of 18 years. This creates a negative environment that does not support girls to continue with school. Most of them end up dropping out of school before reaching standard 8. Some never enrol in primary schools while others fail their examinations, resulting in unnecessary or prolonged class repetitions (MoE, 2022).

There are a number of other international initiatives aimed at dealing with the problem. World Conventions tailored towards addressing the problem have been developed. One example is the World Education Forum that was held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, where different stakeholders such as the Teachers, Academic Policy Makers, NGOs, Prime Ministers and Heads of International Organizations from 164 countries, including Malawi convened. This meeting saw the adoption of the Education for All (EFA)'s Framework for Action. The Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Declaration both established time bound gender equality goals, and the Malawi government ratified both agreements. However, despite the international community efforts, literature still suggests that a myriad of factors that obstruct girls from accessing, progressing and completing their primary school studies remain (World Bank, 2019).

According to research, Malawi is still having very high dropout rates amongst the girls. For instance, the Malawi Demographic Health Survey (2015–2016) report indicates that 12 % of women have no education compared with 5% of their male counterparts (NSO-Malawi & ICF International, 2017). Gondwe (2016), also reported that Malawi has one of the highest school dropout rates in Southern Africa with 15 % of girls and 12 % of boys. UNFPA report (2021), also indicated that only about 25 % of girls actually complete their primary school. MoEST (2018a), also affirmed that the participation of girls in primary schools continues to be lower when compared with that of boys with completion rate of girls estimated at 51 % against their male counterparts, completion rate of 55%. As from 2017/2018 to 2019/2020, the dropout rates are shown in Figure 1 below (MoEST, 2021)

Figure 1: Trends in Dropout Proportions from 2017/18 to 2019/20 (MoEST, 2021).

On the other hand, the 2020 EMIS report shows that girls' education is facing a number of challenges hence more dropouts compared to boys. Statistically, though primary schools across the nation could enrol a good number of girls in standard 5, but not all complete their standard 8 as shown in Figure 2 below.

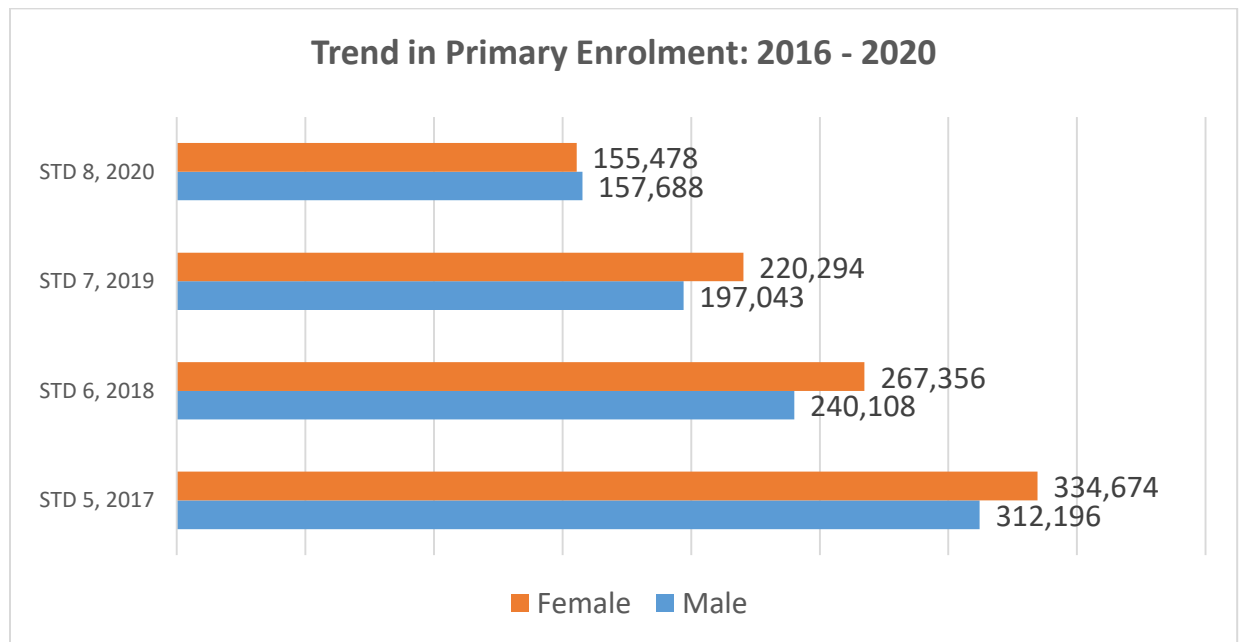


Figure 2: Trend in primary enrolment (Malawi 2020 Education Statistics, page 17)

As it is indicated, in 2017, pupils enrolled in standard 5 were 312,196 boys and 334,674 girls, in 2020, boys enrolled in standard 8 were 155,478 and girls were 157,688 with 154,508 and 179,196 dropouts, respectively. Based on these figures, it is clear that the conditions are not good for girls. Something ought to be done because education is a right and it is essential for the social, economic and political development of a nation. It is very clear that Malawi is struggling to achieve the Education for All and Universal Primary Education aspiration which among others aim to achieve 100% enrolment and 100% completion rates of quality basic cycle of education (MoE, 2022).

Interestingly, although educational outcomes for girls are showing negative indicators, girls' primary education in Malawi is receiving more and more attention as it is taken as a

key tool in sustainable development (Christin & Mupuwaliywa, 2016). There are just too many barriers that avert girls from entering school, causing them to drop out early, or not going beyond primary education (Kadzamira, 2003). Successful education of the girl child has many benefits, hence there is need to take further steps in order to ensure that their education is sustainable. Education is a key to a better quality of life, and it is a way of empowering women.

There are a number of local interventions put in place to alleviate some challenges that girls face in school. These included: radio programmes on gender issues that are broadcast country-wide gender-sensitive curricula and role model literature production; Malawi child-friendly schools programme; Promoting girls' education initiative; Promoting girls' education through Mother-Groups; providing gender friendly school facilities; providing cash transfers and bursaries to girls to address household poverty and family responsibilities; and keeping girls in school (KGIS) Project (Malawi-Government-MoEST, 2018b). The 2020 EMIS report shows that Mother Groups have proved to be a great resource in reinforcing the agenda of keeping girls in school and also ensuring that girls return to school after either pregnancy or marriage. In relation to enhancing the girl-child's and Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in primary schools, different strategies have been put in place by the Government of Malawi to address the existing gender disparities (MoEST, 2014). For instance, strategies such as the 50-50 Enrolment policy whereby schools are by law compelled to enrol equal numbers of girls and boys, free primary education, the introduction of the Re-admission Policy and the extensive construction of classrooms and other important amenities such as changing rooms and toilets of the primary school. Apart from that, the Government of Malawi also developed a National Gender Policy, which has a holistic approach in ensuring a full participation and equitable benefit of both sexes from the development process (MoEST, n.d.-c; Ravishankar et al., 2016).

1.3 Problem statement

Numerous studies and reports reveal that a sizeable number of girls who enrol in primary school in Malawi do not complete their primary school education cycle (MoEST, 2021).

For instance, in 2019 girls who enrolled in public primary schools were 252, 671 in standard 6 and those who were promoted to start standard 7 in 2020 were 213, 379 and in 2021 those who reached standard 8 were 141, 138. These statistics paint a very sombre picture on girls' attainment of education as only about 56% of girls were able to complete their primary education.

Rumphi district has its fair share of drop outs. However, the dropout rates are different for boys and girls. Education data from Ministry of Education shows that more girls are dropping out of schools. For example, in 2022, in Rumphi district, 544 girls (1.72%) and 382 boys (1.18%) dropped out of school (MoEST, 2022). The trend was similar for 2020 and 2021. In 2020, 344 girls and 271 boys dropped out school. In 2021, the number of girls dropping out of school was 446, for boys the total drop out was 195 (MoEST, 2021).

The Mother Groups initiatives is one of the community-led initiatives that is being encouraged by government to promote girls' education. The initiative was adopted as a way of retaining girls in schools so that the trend discussed is reversed. However, since the adoption of this initiative, little is known about the extent to which the initiative has contributed to the reduction of girls' dropout rate in primary schools in Malawi. In the absence of systematic analysis of the performance of these groups, it is difficult to tell the systemic challenges that make them struggle to register the envisaged benefits. The current study existed to contribute towards filling gap. It was envisaged that the study would reveal trends that if attended to, could help improve the retention rate of girls in primary schools in Rumphi district and other districts across the country.

1.4 Significance of the study

The findings would influence change when it comes to reducing or mitigating factors that promote school dropout amongst primary school learners. This is reiterated by the Malawi Education Sector Analysis (2019) which stresses that a window of change might be opened if new strategies are generated for enhancing retention rate amongst the girls in schools. In addition, the findings would also inform policy change. Policy makers would come up with relevant policies that address challenges facing learners in general and girls

in particular, in as far as retention is concerned. Furthermore, it would also contribute to filling the existing gap in literature on curbing the factors that reduce retention rate and school dropout rate amongst girls in primary school.

1.5 Objectives

1.5.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to assess Mother Groups' interventions in the retention of girls in primary schools at Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi District.

1.5.2 Specific objectives

The study was grounded on the following specific objectives;

1. To find out the perceptions of girls, boys, teachers and head teachers towards Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in schools at Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi District.
2. To assess Mother Group perceptions towards girls' education at Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi District.
3. To investigate the mechanisms which have been put in place by the Mother Groups and school staff as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute low retention amongst girls in schools.
4. To assess the impact of the mechanisms which have been put in place by Mother Groups as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute to low retention amongst girls in primary schools.
5. To explore possible strategies that can be used either to retain girls in schools or to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate and high school dropout rate amongst girls in schools.

1.5.3 Research questions

1. What are the perceptions of girls, boys, teachers and head teachers respectively towards Mother Groups' involvement on retention of girls in schools?
2. What are the perceptions of Mother Groups towards the retention of girls in schools?

3. How effective are the mechanisms which have been put in place by Mother Groups as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute to low retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
4. What strategies can be put in place to either retain girls in schools or to mitigate the low retention rate and high school dropout rate amongst girl pupils in schools?

1.6 Definitions of terms

Retention

To retain girls in schools, but also linked to other variables or factors which might negatively affect the school path of girls more than that of the boys. Various factors such as school enrolment, school attendance, dropout rate, completion rate and academic achievements will be linked to retention of girls in primary schools.

Mother Groups

A Mother Group refers to a collective of 10 to 15 women established at each primary school with the aim of providing support to young girls. These groups serve as sources of motivation and role models for girls while also facilitating referrals for sexual and reproductive health services. They operate in close collaboration with other school-level committees such as the Parents Teachers Association (PTAs) and School Management Teams (SMCs).

1.7 Limitation of the Study

The sample for the study was drawn from primary schools at Chozoli cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi district. One limitation of this study is the potential for selection bias, as the sample was drawn from specific representatives of Mother Groups, Teachers, and Pupils, which may not fully represent the diverse range of perspectives within the broader community. Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the study design limited the researcher's ability to establish causality or assess long-term effects. Longitudinal research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained impact of Mother Groups on girl's retention in schools over time. Finally, while efforts were made to analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, the study's reliance on subjective

interpretations during thematic analysis introduces the possibility for researcher bias, impacting the validity of the findings.

1.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has highlighted the problems affecting girls in primary schools. Using statistics, the chapter provided a picture of the disadvantages that girls face as compared to boys in as far as completion of primary school is concerned in Malawi as well as in Rumphi. The chapter has explained the statement of the problem, the purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, limitations, and the definition of key terms.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In order to have a clear picture of the state of education in Malawi regarding retention of girls in primary schools and Mother Groups' efforts to eliminate or negate girl-child school high dropout rate in Malawi, various studies of entities have been carried out over the years. Some of these studies have been done by UNESCO-Institute-of-Statistics, (2016), Malawi-Government-MoEST (2018a), Gondwe (2016), NSO-Malawi & ICF International (2017) and UNICEF (2015-2019). This chapter provides an analysis of these and many other studies. Through this analysis, the gap that this study was trying to fill has been made clear.

2.2 Girls' retention in school

To improve global girls' education outcomes, it is essential to make sure that there is a reduction in their school dropout rate and repetition and enhancing survival rate that lead to completion rate. This entails that girls should achieve better quality education with full and equal participation as boys could do in the same condition and classroom environment. There is a lot of literature on the retention of girls with a number of scholars, such as Mikisa (2019), MacDonald (2017), Murugu (2014) and Munene (2013) providing a crosscutting discussion on the topic. For instance, Oywa (2011), writing on the situation in Kenya, indicated that Suba District continues to register one of the poorest retention rates of girls, thus showing that even among the few girls who are retained, their performance is wanting. The study attributed such challenges to early marriages, HIV/AIDS and lack of regard for girls in education. It is clear in this study that there are a number of factors that contribute to the keeping of girls out of school.

In Malawi, lack of age appropriate reproductive health information and knowledge, detrimental cultural practices, self-efficacy and utilization of services which, if made available, have been found to be important factors that could assist in reducing drop-out rates (UNFPA, 2016). Furthermore, Cardine (2012) conducted a study examining the impact of socio-cultural factors on the academic performance of female learners. The

findings of the study revealed that as girls grow older, there is a decline in the number of those remaining in school. By the age of 15, for example, many girls chose to leave school for reasons such as marriage, caring for orphaned siblings due to HIV/AIDS, or prioritizing their brothers' education. The present study has critiqued the role of Mother Groups in retaining girls in school, aiming to assess their effectiveness in reducing school dropout rates.

2.3 Socioeconomic factors that affect girls' education

A number of studies have been conducted to assess social factors that affect girls' education. Mkamanga, Ndala and Chigeda (2022) conducted a study to investigate underlining cultural factors impeding girls' secondary education in Lilongwe Rural West Education Division (LRWED) of Malawi. Their findings indicated that key social-cultural factors affecting girls' education in LRWED include: girls' initiation ceremonies, unplanned pregnancies, early marriages and poverty. As for initiation ceremonies, they were found to contribute to early sex experimentation that undermined girls' continued interest and persistence in education through poor retention, repetition, and subsequent dropout. The findings further revealed that the absence of sex education in the schools' curriculum is the lead cause of parental dependence on local initiation ceremonies. However, their study did not intend to investigate on how these cultural challenges are being mitigated by the Mother Groups.

Similarly, Wilson (2010) conducted a survey on education and girls' development in Malawi, assessing social factors that influence girls' education. The findings show that the main social factors that constrain girls' education are cultural norms and expectations, as well as funding. These social norms include expectations for girls' to do house hold chores, to get married and to take care of their siblings at home. On the one hand, it was also discovered that money is an issue for families in rural areas. Some families have no choice but to keep their daughters at home to help take care of the house and family. In addition, Wilson also found that teacher's and male pupils' attitude towards girl pupils is another social factor that impedes girls' education at the primary school. The study concluded by suggesting that the movement of social mobilization has to be empowered

at the community level to take grass root level steps in improving the quality of education and the educational equality between girls and boys. It was with this in mind that the current study wanted to access the strategies that Mother Groups, as a grassroots institution, use in dealing with such challenges which are leading to rampant school dropout among the girls.

Davison & Kanyuka (1990), also conducted a study on girls' participation in basic education in southern Malawi. The study found that gender structuring results in the way that resources within a family may be distributed, such as educational resources. Most parents do not think it is necessary or important for girls to be educated, as such they are more inclined to keep their daughters at home where they can help around the house with chores and save the money that could be spent on the daughter if in school. In addition, it was also revealed that teachers and boys had negative attitudes and wrong stereotypes on girls; girls are labelled as less serious, less capable than their male counterparts and more playful. It was further revealed that teachers viewed domestic sciences such as home economics and home crafts as crucial skills for girls, over subjects such as English and Mathematics. It was also discovered that teachers regard boys having higher capabilities for learning than girls. Consequently, these biased viewpoints lead to insufficient encouragement of girls by teachers in the classroom or a lack of taking them seriously. It was with this in mind that the current study wanted to critically assess both teachers and boys' perceptions towards girls' education and how the Mother Groups are coordinating with teachers and male pupils.

In addition, similar research studies were conducted and found that another social problem which has been negatively affecting retention rate at the primary school is poverty. Barnett (2018), argued that among the most serious obstacles that children from poor social groups face is the high opportunity cost that a child's family incurs from the loss of that child's labour in the formal or informal sector and resulting reduction in household income earning potential. As such, there is a lot of empirical evidence pointing to the fact that the necessity for children to perform economically important tasks that support their household survival limits their participation in education, especially in rural and urban squatter groups. It is further noted that even when schools are accessible and

affordable, families have to see a net advantage to themselves and their children from going children's full-time participation in domestic and economic activities further arguing that in countries where the state has limited powers to enforce compulsory schooling laws, families serve as their children's gate-keepers through their control over children's access to the educational resources made available by the state (McConnell & Mupuwaliywa, 2016). According to Gabriel (2016), the children themselves hardly make these decisions, but rather it is their parents, guardians and relatives. However, these studies did not propose possible strategies that can be put in place in order to deal with the problem of using girls as a means of labour so that the retention rate could be strengthened. Hence, the current study assessed the grass root structures especially the Mother Groups' initiative to see how vibrant the game plan is for the retention rate amongst the girls in primary schools.

Furthermore, similar studies found that economic background and low family income has contributed to the low retention rate amongst the girls. For instance, Taban (2010) in a study conducted in Northern Tororo in Tanzania focusing on retention of learners in school reported that relatively low number of girls progress up the academic ladder and hence low retention. He outlined such bottle necks that impede girl academic progress as regressive practices which demean women in social life; poor economic background and low family income placing priority on boys in total disregard of their female counterparts. In addition, putting a strong justification for the realization of a near 100% retention of learners through all levels of education, in Japan, Aurela (2011) observed that measures that address socio-economic gaps among families must be provided by the government to offer learners from unfortunate families the opportunities to be retained in schools just like those from well to do families. Besides, Morline (2009) noted in her study conducted in the far flung areas of Sang Wan village in China, that educated citizens are much more productive in society than less educated and that most countries that struggle to develop have glaring economic gaps that negate learners' retention at different levels of schooling.

In Argentina, access, retention and transition equally faces a myriad of challenges as indicated by Otega (2012) in his that focused on addressing social gaps in society through education. He observed that personal challenges experienced by individual learners, particularly girls from low social family background were to blame for the failure to obtain substantial education, since retention rate was low. In Lesotho, a study done by Nyabanyaba (2008), found that the country is facing a lot of challenges when it comes to access and retention of learners especially girls in schools. All these studies did not indicate the crucial roles of Mother Groups as a way of keeping girls in schools as a means of revamping retention rate amongst the girls in primary schools. This was what this study sought to address.

2.4 Global trends in the retention of girls in school.

Globally, girls represent the majority of children out of school and face some of the biggest challenges in getting an education. Current studies show that there is still a challenge in retention rate and enrolment amongst girls in primary schools. For instance, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2020 report indicates that about 65 million children of primary school age are not enrolled in school. The report also gives comparative statistics for Latin America and Caribbean, Europe and Northern America, Central and Southern Asia, and Oceania. The trend depicts that out of school children primary school age are significantly higher in sub-Saharan African region than in developing regions. It also reports that out of 33 million primary school children dropout about 19 million are girls from sub-Saharan Africa region.

As for Malawi, it is reported that girls across the country at all levels of education are at higher risk of dropping out of school than boys. For instance, Gondwe (2019), MoEST (2018a) and EMIS 2021 reports, point out that Malawi has one of the highest school dropout rates with 15 % of girls (three in every twenty) and 12 % of boys (three in every twenty-five), dropping out between Standard 5 and 8 of primary school. On the other hand, they also indicated that participation of girls in upper primary especially in Standard 8 continues to be lower when compared against their male counterparts such that completion rate of girls is estimated at 51 % while that of boys was 55 %. It was with

this in mind that the current study wanted to assess the centrality of Mother Groups' initiatives on retention of girls in schools despite the dire situation of girls' education in Malawi. Assessing such local interventions is crucial if the dropout rates are to be reduced to the level of the developed regions.

2.5 The status of girls' education in Africa

Studies in West Africa indicated that parents unless wealthy, preferred to educate their sons on the assumption that education "pays off" in life time wages more handsomely for males than for females (Sohoo & Klasen, 2018). In addition, FAWE (2016) reported that in Zambia the girl-child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life. Girls have unequal access to schools from boys, their performance in class is poor, they experience early drop-out, and their enrolment in schools is low. As observed by Kelly (2017) there was a steady attrition of girls relative to boys in Zambia over the twelve years of primary and secondary school, such that by Grade 12 female students accounted for only about 35% of the enrolment. However, the degree to which this belief is widespread and persistent has not been investigated. But it is known that there are different expectations on the part of teachers about girls' performance compared to that of boys. Hence, the current study has been carried out in order to investigate how the Mother Groups' involvement on retention of girls in primary schools is progressing so that girls are not discriminated in primary schools.

Similarly, in Zambia McConnell and Mupuwaliywa (2015) also conducted a study and found that school dropout rates portray the most significant gender differences in education. It was found that starting in grade 6, more girls leave school than boys. For instance, in 2013 to 2014 girls dropped out of school more than double the rate of boys in grade 7 and three times the rate of boys in grade 11. According to their study, these dropout rates vary considerably by region such as; Northwestern, Luapula, and Northern provinces having the highest dropout rates for girls in grades 1 to 9. It was also revealed that pregnancy, economic hardship, and early marriage and lack of financial support were the main reported reasons causing girls to drop out of school. However, according to the 2002 to 2010 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey, disaggregated by gender, girls

argued that the primary reason for their school dropout was pregnancy. In addition, according to 2014 Demographic and Health Survey data, nearly 30 percent of girls withdrawn from their primary school studies due to pregnancy. Pregnancy disproportionately affects the rural population, as 79 percent of the girls who leave school due to pregnancy are in rural areas (2014 Education Management Information System [EMIS] data). The bottom line here is that girls' education is encountering a myriad of challenges which need to be dealt with systematically by engaging Mother Groups' initiative. Hence, it was very necessary for the current study to be carried out so that it might establish the extent to which school dropout of girls in schools has been reduced by the efforts of Mother Groups.

Similarly, Munene (2013), conducted a research study on school based factors influencing Girls' retention in schools of Kenya. She argued that failure to retain girls in schools can be considered as a waste of potential human resources and money spent on them in primary education hence they may become a breed of illiterate women who are less productive economically, socially and politically. Her study was conducted with the aim of investigating school-based factors influencing girls' retention in secondary schools in Dadaab refugee camp. The main findings of the study indicated that the cost of education was a major contributor to girls' drop out. Girls also missed school due to inadequate sanitary facilities during their menstruation. Besides, most schools were male-teachers dominated hence more school dropout amongst the girls just to mention. The schools were not girl-friendly. With this in mind, the current study has critiqued the Mother Groups' motivational strategies that have been put in place in order to enhance high retention rate amongst the girls. The main idea behind it was to see how they help to create girl friendly schools, ensuring availability of sanitary facilities during girls' menstruation and intervening in schools where male teachers are dominating.

Mekonnen (2017), also conducted a study, investigating parents' involvement in the management of primary schools in Oromiya National Regional State, Ethiopia. The main concern of the study was to find out the challenges that lead to decline in parental involvement in their children's schooling, low stakeholders' participation in the

management of primary schools, lack of awareness of students and their families on the school context that lead to increased rates of learner achievement, just to mention but a few. The findings show that although the Ethiopian educational policy tries to advocate parental involvement in the management of primary schools for improving educational quality at its level and through obtaining better family school governance experiences, parents were not actively participating in their children's learning endeavours and school principals and PTA chairpersons did not seem to appreciate the possible advantages that could emanate from complete parental involvement in the management of elementary schools. It was found that 10 percent of parents were recorded as their participation in supporting their children education. However, the study didn't specifically indicate how parental involvement contributes to retention rate amongst the girls in their primary schools. Hence, the current study has among others evaluated the Mother Groups' involvement in promoting retention rate in primary schools especially for the girls.

Mercan (2019), also conducted a similar study on perceptions of parents regarding girls' education-Sivas case. The sample consisted of 241 parents whose daughters attended the public primary schools in Sivas participated in the study. A statistical program, SPSS, was utilized to carry out the statistical analyses. As such, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was employed to explore whether there were significant differences between parents' perceptions of benefits of girls' education and barriers to girls' education with respect to retention rate. The results indicated that parents had positive thoughts and beliefs about girls' education. As for the barriers to girls' education, the findings pointed out that parents were mostly concerned about financial difficulties and security affairs. It was discovered that girls' schooling ratio has been increasing by year, especially, in primary education. However, female schooling ratio is lower than the total and male schooling ratio at every level of education such that at all levels of education enrolment rates of girls continue to be considerably lower than those of boys with high regional disparity; 91% of boys and 69% of girls are enrolled in basic education. The study concluded that there was a low participation rate for girls in schools compared to boys as well as non-attendance or non-enrolment in compulsory education in the south east of the country in particular. However, the study was conducted in the

secondary schools targeting the female students and also it was assessing the perceptions of parents regarding girls' education. The current study has been conducted at primary level in Rumphu district.

Mutanani (2016), conducted a similar research study on challenges affecting the school retention of the girl child in Hurungwe District of Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that the following contribute to low retention rate amongst girls in primary schools: parents not having enough money to meet school needs, teenage pregnancies, family problems such as marital conflicts, parents' death, the need to earn money and due to travelling long distances. The study also found that the majority of the girls who drop out end up being domestic workers.

Mikisa (2019) conducted a similar study to investigate factors most associated with primary school dropout in the Busolwe sub-county, Butaleja district of Eastern Uganda. Descriptive analysis established that the major contributing factors to girls' dropping out could be grouped into three categories; girls' internal characteristics, family environment, and school environment. The findings are presented in figure 3 which illustrates the dropout crisis in Butaleja district, showing girls are more disadvantaged than boys.

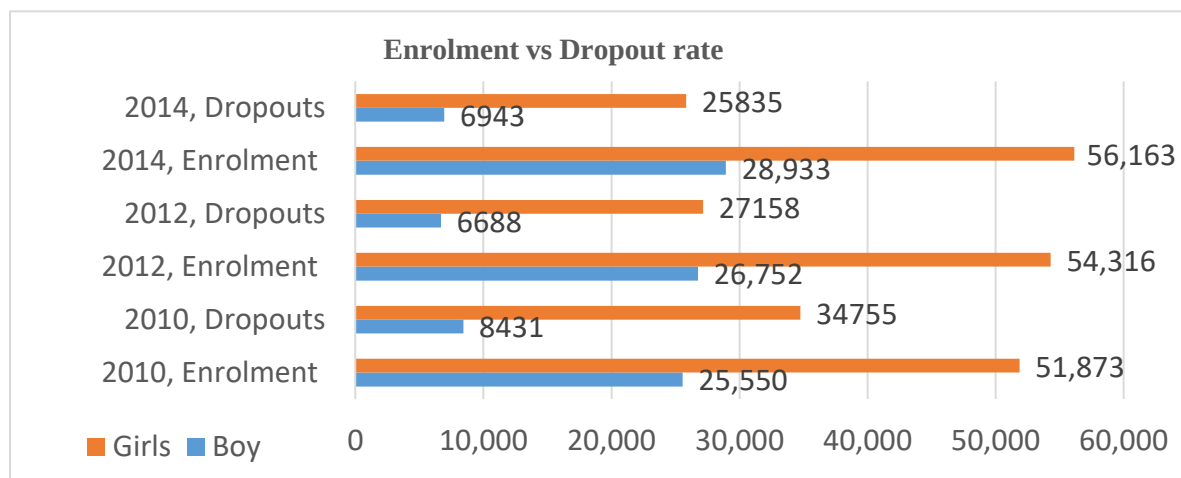


Figure 3: Uganda Primary Enrolment and Dropout rates. Source: EMIS Uganda Bures of Statistics, 2016, pp 2-3 cited in Mikisa (2019, p3)

A study by Epstein (2015) conducted in order to assess parental involvement in children's schooling. Epstein argued that schools should plan on how to involve parents in their endeavours so that it could be a parameter to be used in order to create an additional partnership into their children's learning. He further argues that such an approach gives a gradual chance for parents by guiding and promoting school-parent partnerships and that despite efforts by different groups such as professionals, researchers, and policymakers to enhance parental involvement, standards have to be set forth if effective and efficient is to be achieved. In line with Epstein (2015), Nieto (2004:163) confirms that some scholars and school leaders believe that families need to be well-informed through different awareness creation activities conducted by schools. In other words, their argument is that most parents have deficits regarding their involvement for their children education in primary schools. Hinderson et al. (2004) also point out that parents who are disadvantaged, uneducated or less educated may have reservations with the modern education culture, frequently observing that it is not easy to connect with their children's school life. However, the study did not elaborate further on how parental involvement especially the Mother Groups could enhance retention rate among the girls in primary schools, an aspect that is at the centre of this study.

Owano (2011) in her study on factors that influence the retention of female students in secondary schools in Muhoroni division, Kisumu County found that several factors inhibit the full participation of girls in education, including initiation rites which interfered with the normal school and class attendance. In most cases, girl's enrolment in grade 1 are almost the same as boys (Katongo, 2013). The gap between sexes starts to widen from grade 5 to grade 7. This is because the drop up rate for girls is higher than for boys. In Malawi, the Ministry of Education MoEST reports that from 2015 to 2021, the enrolment of girls in public primary schools has been low compared to the completion rate. Figure 4 illustrates how Malawi has been fairing against Zambia and Uganda in as far as the general completion rate amongst the primary school learners is concerned.

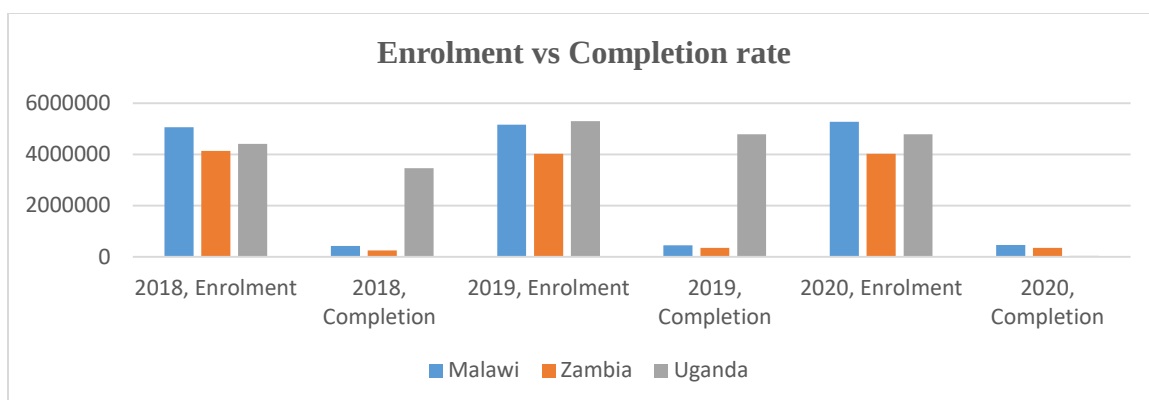


Figure 4: How Malawi is fairing with other countries

As can be seen, in terms of completion rate, Malawi is behind compared to Zambia and Uganda. This makes it even more important to identify and address grassroots factors that are fueling this poor performance.

2.6 The Status on Girls' Education in Malawi with regard to retention.

Several studies have been conducted on girls' education in Malawi. According to UNICEF (2017), it is reported that in primary school, the enrolment, retention and completion rates of girls were lower than that of boy and many parents prefer to spend the little money they have on the education of boys rather than on girls. According to the 2015–2016 Education Sector Performance Report (MoEST, n.d.-b), in 2016 a total of 10.2 per cent of girls and 8.8 per cent of boys dropped out of primary school. Another study that drew on EMIS data, looked at dropout rates between 2010 and 2015 and found that at Standard 7, the dropout rate was much higher for girls than boys (McConnell & Mupuwaliywa, 2016). To improve access and retention of the girl child in basic schools, the Government used a number of strategies. One of them was a girls' education initiative locally known as 'The Programme for the Advancement of Girls' Education (The World Bank, 2016). This study was rooted in this government initiative.

The Malawi Education Sector Analysis (2019) critically analyzed the progress of primary education in Malawi. Statistically, the number of children enrolled in primary education in 2018 was 5,187,634, which is a 47.1% increase from 3,600,771 in 2008. On the one

hand, the net intake rate (NIR) was improved from 71% in 2008 to 84% in 2018. NIR is the proportion of new entrants to Standard 1 who are of the official primary school entrance age (6 years old) to the total population of children aged 6. A high NIR shows a high degree of access to primary education at the official primary school entrance age. As such, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER), rose by nearly 5 percentage points from 122% in 2009 to 127% in 2018. Besides, it is also shown that the gender parity index (GPI) for primary education remained at 1.0 or slightly above between 2008 and 2019. This implies that there is almost equal number of boys and girls in primary education institutions, with more girls in some cases, a reflection of the population gender split in Malawi. However, according to EMIS (2021) the current statistics or status depict that the internal efficiency such as retention rate, repetition rate, completion rate, survival rate, dropout rate and promotion rate respectively remains a challenge in one way or the other. It shows that the proportion of girls who accessed education in Malawi at the beginning of primary school decreased towards the upper primary school classes. Figure 5 below is a boy-girl comparison as regards to internal efficiency for the three consecutive years of 2019 to 2021. For instance, girls in terms of completion rate (std 8), dropout rate (from std 6 to 8), survival rate (std 8) and promotion rate (from std 6 to 8) respectively, have been slightly behind compared to boys except repetition rate (from std 6 to 8).

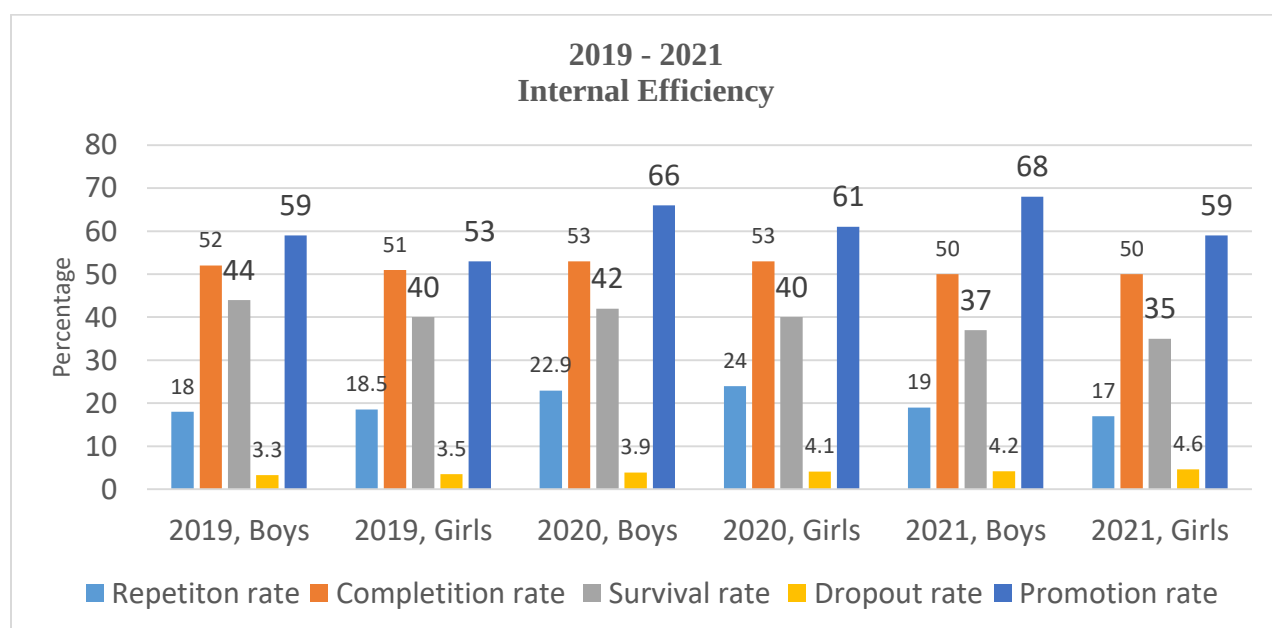
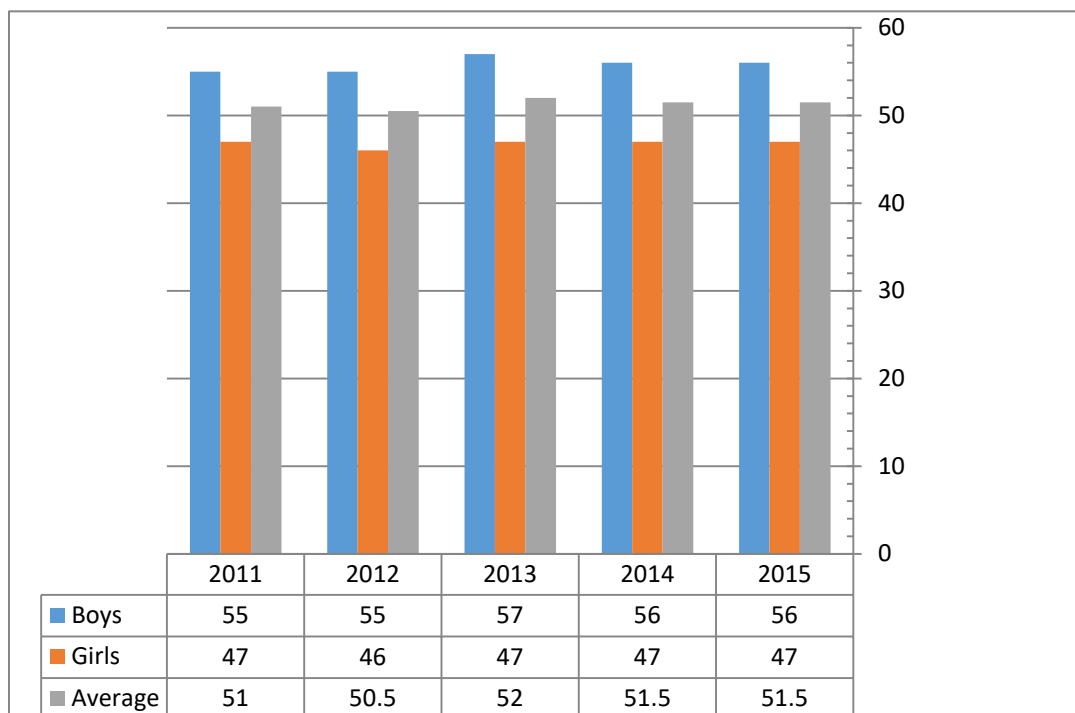


Figure 5: 2019 -2021 internal efficiency

The implication here is that as a nation Malawi is not advancing as regards girls' education in primary school. Therefore, there is need for studies, such as these to be carried out in order to assess the impact of grass-root interventions such as Mother Groups to identify the struggles that they are going through.

As reported in the EMIS 2015 Report (MoEST, n.d.-c), the situation has been like this from the past. For instance, the 2014 to 2015 primary school completion rate for girls was 47 per cent compared to boys whose completion rate was 56 per cent. The report also indicated that there have been a large number of girls who accessed education at the beginning of primary school, only for most of them to dropout towards the upper primary school classes. In addition, the survival rates at primary education reported in the 2015 to 2016 Education Sector Performance Report (MoEST, n.d.-b) were much lower; 29.0% for girls and 36% for boys. Figure 6 below illustrates the trends in completion rate of both girls and boys from 2011 to 2015.



Source: EMIS 2015 Report (MoEST, n.d.-c, p. 52).

Figure 6: Primary school completion rates 2011–2015, by gender

Here the implication is that the problem of girl's retention has been there for years hence the need for a critical redress. In Africa, Malawi is one of the countries where school enrolment for girls at Primary School level is 50% of the total enrolment, but this decreases to below 40% as they ascend academic ladder to secondary level and further below 30 % in tertiary level (MoEST, 2018-2019). According to the Malawi Education Sector Analysis (2019), gender disparity continues to persist in certain areas in Malawi and that there are persistent constraints that continue to hinder girls from completing education at all levels. This is an indicator that concerted efforts should be put in place to help in promoting retention in order to achieve gender equality to access of primary education for girls.

Mansuri & Rao (2012), also asserted that the Education Sector should put in place documented guidelines which aim at enhancing girls' education in order to improve education delivery through community participation. This is in line with the country's grass root structures which have been formulated across the country, such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), Area Development Committee (ADC), SMC, CBOs and associated school committees in order to enhance girls' education. Sharma (2016) concurs by positing that Community involvement facilitates the identification of community specific education issues and informs the development of strategies to remove barriers to access and quality in education within a given community especially to girl-child education. Currently, another key grass-root structure, the Mother Group initiative has emerged in order to add value to girls' education as regards to retention of girls in primary schools (Gul, 2017). The current study sought to examine the efforts of the involvement of Mother Groups.

Feminist research has engaged with issues of inequality in education by seeking to explain why such inequalities continue to exist. The equal opportunities approach dominated the field of gender and education in 2000s, with its concern being equal rights, equal access and participation or retention, freedom of choice and the removal of sex discrimination (Arnot, David & Weiner 2015). The sex-role socialization theory,

concerned with sex stereotyping, offered the possibility of uncovering the ways in which boys and girls were being prepared for their assigned roles in society. Arnot and Dillabough (2016) complements the concern for equal rights and often quite subtle ways in which society channels each generation into rather narrow and conventional sex roles. Such patterns of socialization whether found in the family, amongst peer groups or in educational institutions obstructs girls' full development. It is argued that the feminist theories direct women to see themselves as capable in as far as education endeavors are concerned (Sperling, Winthrop & Kwauk, 2016).

In enhancing the retention of girls in Malawi, the Malawi Government developed a number of policies and strategies that are designed to support girls' education. For instance, the introduction of the Free Primary Education policy in 1994 and the National Education Sector Plan (NESP). The former initiative removed school fees and increased enrolment from 1.8 million in 1993 to 4.8 million in 2015 (MoEST, n.d.-c; Ravishankar et al., 2016). It was regarded as one of the success education stories in Malawi as both boys and girls had an increased access to education. The Policy and Investment Framework (PIF) came into existence in order to support girls' access to all levels of education in order to achieve 50 per cent or more of female enrolments (JICA & IDCJ, 2012). The NESP, apart from improving the enrolment and retention rate of girls at school through the provision of bursaries, made sure that the necessary amenities are available, promoted advocacy campaigns and ensured that the Readmission Policy is implemented. The NESP also planned to establish Mother Groups in primary schools by 2017 to 2018 in order to support girls' education (MoEST, 2008a). The Mother Groups' ultimate purpose is to achieve a high retention rate of at least 90 percent or more. This study sought to provide quantitative evidence of the performance of Mother Groups in Rumphi against the nationally set target of 90 percent retention rate.

According to CSEC (2014), the right to education is one of the human rights entrenched in a number of global developments and human rights instruments. It is further argued that the right to education for the girl child is a key because it gives way to the protection of other rights. As regards to girls' education, Malawi ratified the United Nations Charter

on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the global Education for All (EFA) commitment and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) among other international instruments that put children and education at the centre of the human rights based approach to development. Under the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, the UN put in place a goal whose specific role is to ensure the fulfillment of the right to a quality education by each member of the largest single group of children denied this right especially girls.

In April 2000, at the Dakar World Education Forum, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, launched the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). 13 UN entities, led by UNICEF, have agreed to work together in order to help governments meet their commitments to ensuring quality education for all girls everywhere. Basically, all these international treaties aim at narrowing the gender gap in primary and secondary education and to ensure that all children complete primary schooling, with girls and boys having equal access to all levels of education. In Malawi, the Mother Groups' initiative is seen as a direct arm of the UNGEI, hence the need to systematically monitor and assess its activities in different locales.

In a study assessing the progress made in increasing girls' education access with focus on readmission policy and other related policies, CSEC (2014) established that access to education for girls in all the targeted districts was generally not a problem but has a myriad of challenges such as teenage pregnancies, vulnerable girls from poor resource households, orphanhood, parental disabilities, making them unable to afford direct and indirect school-related costs. Many full primary and secondary schools are also located far away from homes and they lack access to secure and latrines for girls. These factors, in one way or the other, affected many girls transition from one level to another, discouraged them from attending school and lead to high repetition rate and eventual high girls dropout counts than boys. This study also established that in the face of the challenge of keeping girls in school, the re-admission policy is not effectively implemented in Malawi. For example, only 49% of the girls who left school had been re-admitted in all the six districts. Due to lack of documented guidelines and procedures for

readmission, about 53% girls still dropped out of school even after their readmission (USAID, 2014). Among others, the current study assessed Mother Groups' efforts towards addressing this challenge and others in Chozoli, Phalasito, Biwirizi and Nkhwangu schools.

A joint study by UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA (2014-2017), revealed that girl-child school dropout rate is a big challenge in Malawi. For instance, data from the NSO (2012) revealed that 58% of girls drop out of school and out of those remaining in school, 18% became pregnant and 8% married. The NSO survey further revealed that harmful cultural practices, lack of age- appropriate reproductive health information and knowledge as such it results in girls not able to exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights make girls increasingly susceptible to early sexual debut, teenage pregnancies, early marriage, and exposure to HIV and other STI. The NSO survey (2012) also found that most parents in Malawi would like to provide school needs for their son's education than their daughters' because the latter is seen as a futile investment. It is seen as a better investment since girls are expected to work at home and to join their husbands' families at marriage. Again, a UNICEF (2015) study also established that students' attendance at primary school is largely sacrificed during the economic crisis, particularly, during the first quarter of the year when they are mobilized for agricultural cultivation. The current study has investigated the extent of the issues raised by the UNICEF and NSO studies in Chozoli Phalasito, Biwirizi, Nkhwangu and how the Mother Groups are managing them.

Lack of resources is also negatively affecting girls' education in Malawi. According to McConnell and Mupuwaliywa (2016), several ongoing initiatives are helping to keep Malawian girls in school. The ongoing £37.5 million DfID-sponsored Keeping Girls in School (KGIS) project planned to deliver cash transfers to 100,000 primary school girls, bursaries to 15,000 secondary school girls, and improved sanitation and hygiene facilities in 200 community day secondary schools by July 2016. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) also currently supports over 6,000 needy girls and 8,000 boys with secondary school bursaries, two-thirds of whom also receive a cash transfer. At national level, the MoEST had a strong National Girls Education Strategy that aligns activities in this area between 2013 and 2018. It can be concluded that there is

sufficient collective effort from a good number of educational stakeholders' on girls' education. The question could be to what extent do Mother Groups fit within this national framework on interventions? This study has provided an answer to this and many other questions on the impact of these groups.

2.7 Mother Groups initiatives in Malawi.

As per the Girls' Primary and Secondary Education in Malawi: Sector Review (2017), the Mother Groups initiative, spearheaded by the Ministry of Education, serves as a supportive measure for girls' education nationwide. Comprising women from local communities, these groups are established within each school with the aim of offering encouragement, serving as role models, and facilitating access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for young girls. Through the UN Joint Programme on Girls' Education, the UNFPA has been instrumental in bolstering the capacity and technical expertise of Mother Groups to fulfill their responsibilities in ensuring girls' retention in school. Their multifaceted roles encompass not only promoting school attendance and completion but also disseminating crucial SRH information and facilitating the re-entry of girls into school following pregnancy or marriage.

Yapuwa (2019) observed that the Mother Groups initiative in Assam significantly contributed to enhancing children's education, particularly for girls, showcasing its effectiveness in improving educational outcomes. Meanwhile, Winter (2024) highlighted the impact of parental involvement in school management on pupil retention rates in Uganda, underscoring the critical role played by parental engagement. Sharma et al. (2016) found that Mothers Groups served as an effective platform for engaging mothers in their child's education, considering that fathers often faced work-related constraints preventing their participation. However, Rahman & Mim (2021) pointed out challenges hindering the effectiveness of community participation initiatives, such as Mother Gatherings, in addressing school dropout rates, citing issues like poverty and limited awareness of formal education within the community. Despite these challenges, the pivotal role of Mother Groups in enhancing girls' education within communities remains evident, prompting the need for a comprehensive assessment of their performance and impact, as pursued in this study.

According to the MoEST (2014), the Mother Groups were initiated in 2014 to increase access and retention rate to quality education for girls in the country such that they are expected to reduce girls' dropouts' rate in schools by ensuring conducive teaching and learning environment and to improve parental involvement. They schedule the activities annually which are designed to facilitate the retention of girls in schools. With the technical expertise and support of other educational stakeholders, the girl-child education and other activities have the girls as the main beneficiaries. The initiative focuses on empowering girls with knowledge, skills and self-concept in order to bring their participation in education at par with that of boys. It is viewed as one of the main ways of enhancing girls' interest in education. Despite this initiative however, the poor indicators of girls' education in Chozoli area and beyond continue to grow, raising questions on the efficacy of the initiative. It is only through a systematic and structured study that a clear picture of the performance of these Mother Groups could be construed.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study encompasses Acholonu's (1995) motherism theory and Woodley and Parlett's learner retention theory. Acholonu's motherism theory posits that women possess inherent qualities of compassion, nurturance, and child-centeredness, extending their influence beyond traditional domestic roles. Women are seen as fundamental agents of societal transformation, challenging patriarchal structures and advocating for the rights and empowerment of marginalized groups, including girls. This theory illuminates the multifaceted role of women in society and addresses how cultural inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal systems marginalize the girl-child (Acholonu, 1995). Complementing this perspective, Woodley and Parlett's learner retention theory explores the factors influencing students' ability to remain engaged and retained in educational settings. This theory emphasizes the need for researchers to view learner drop-out from a multi-angles of pedagogical approaches, socio-economic status, and community support in fostering learner retention, the pull and push factors (Huang, 2005).

By integrating these theories into the theoretical framework, the study gains a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics surrounding the involvement of Mother Groups in enhancing the retention of girls in primary schools within the Chozoli cluster, Bumba zone in Rumphi District. The combined lens of motherism theory and learner retention theory facilitates an examination of the transformative potential of women's participation in education activities and the mechanisms through which community-based interventions can contribute to improving girls' educational outcomes. This integrated approach informs the study's exploration of effective strategies for promoting girls' education and empowerment within the study area.

2.9 Research Gap

From the reviewed literature, it is clear that the current scholars are agreeing that many professionals are concerned about the alarming primary school girls drop out compared to their male counterparts. The studies have outlined a variety of factors to account for these high school dropout rates. However, these studies fall short of providing some kind of feedback on the performance of some of the interventions that have been implemented to address the problem. Without sufficient information on the efficacy of the different interventions, it would not be possible to effectively deal with this problem. Keeping girls in schools is a crucial step towards the achievement of socio-economic development in a country. The current study sought to fill this gap by doing a descriptive analysis of the efforts of Mother Groups in reducing school dropout and increasing retention rate amongst girls in schools. As it is already indicated earlier on that Mother Groups' initiative is an idea which the Government of Malawi through the Ministry of Education started implementing in 2017.

2.10 Chapter summary

The literature review has shown that there is a great concern for girls' education globally. The chapter reviewed literature on the status of the problem across the world, in Africa and Malawi. Mother Groups, as one of the interventions designed to deal with challenges that girls face in their daily education life, was also discussed in terms of how it started

and its objectives. The present study sought to fill in the gap as described in the above section.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview.

This chapter presents the research design, methodologies and procedures which were used for data generation for this current study. These include aspects of data generation, instrumentation and data processing techniques used. Procedures for choice of study sites, subjects and sampling techniques, and how research instruments were administered have also been highlighted.

3.2 Research approach

This study utilized a mixed methods research approach, which involves integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods within a single study to comprehensively understand a research problem. The mixed methods approach enabled the researcher to investigate both the qualitative aspects of participants' experiences and perceptions, as well as the quantitative data concerning learner retention rates and associated factors. The research paradigm guiding this study was pragmatism, which emphasizes employing multiple methods to address research questions and focuses on what is most effective for understanding and solving real-world problems. The pragmatic approach recognizes the value of both qualitative and quantitative data in capturing different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Creswell (2009) emphasized that a mixed research design allows for a deeper understanding of the problem compared to using qualitative and quantitative designs separately. For example, quantitative methods were necessary to determine retention, survival, dropout, and completion rates, providing a comprehensive statistical overview of the issue. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data occurred throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Moreover, mixed methods facilitated complementary insights, with qualitative data offering depth and richness in understanding participants' experiences, while quantitative data provided statistical evidence and generalizability. This integration

allowed for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study by comparing findings from different sources. Additionally, as argued by Frankel and Wallen (2009), mixed methods can clarify and explain relationships between variables. In this study, the impact of Mother Groups' efforts, evaluated qualitatively, could be better understood by examining statistical patterns obtained through quantitative methods regarding retention rates, attendance patterns, and demographic characteristics. Overall, a mixed methods approach within a pragmatic paradigm enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of Mother Groups in learner retention, combining the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods to inform policy and practice in education.

3.2.1 Qualitative Methods

The study largely used qualitative methods. In qualitative studies, the natural setting is the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument (Barbie, 2008). The data collected from the natural settings has given a comprehensive picture of the problem at hand in Bumba Zone as well as Chozoli cluster. The researcher interacted directly with members of Mother Groups as well as girls from the zone to learn from them the issues being addressed by this study. This way, it was very easy to learn the various challenges that the mothers have been encountering in their daily endeavour to keep the girls in school.

3.2.2 Quantitative method

Apart from qualitative research design method, the study also used quantitative methods. According to Bryman (2008), quantitative research entails the collection of numerical data exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive predilection for natural sciences approach and having an objectivist conception of reality. From the position of quantitative research, measurement, causality and generalizations are some of the main features. Hence, the current study used quantitative data, such as the percentage regarding retention; enrolment of girls, survival rate, and dropout rate, to assess the impact of the interventions that are put in place by Mother Groups. In that way, the quantitative data has provided empirical evidence on how the Mother Groups' involvement has helped or failed to help rectify the challenges of girls' education.

3.3 Research design

This study used a case study design. A case study design focuses on a single unit, such as individuals, one group or one program (Jacobs et al., 2010). Yin (1991) in Sarantakos (2005), also argued that a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. The current study has used of Mother Groups, Teachers, Pupils in school and Pupils that had dropped out of school purposefully selected from primary schools cluster. As such, these four Mother Groups were treated as case studies. The study adopted a case study design to find answers to the research question. Woods and Calanzaro(as cited in Heale& Twycross 2018) defines a case study as an intensive, systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community or some other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth relating to several variables. Using a case study has many advantages and some of which have been explained by several scholars. A case study has potential to bring out real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena. A case study may also assist to obtain detailed, rich and relevant data. It should be noted that due to the nature of this research, it was very important that case study should be used as the researcher needed to understand vividly the contextual issues that affect the performance of the Mother Groups. This was possible because the case study approach allows for the employment of a variety of interrelated methods and sources.

3.4 Study site and study population.

The study was conducted in Rumphu district and four school were chosen. This cluster was selected because it has the largest number of dropout cases in the district (CSEC, 2014; EMIS, 2021). Furthermore, this cluster has a patriarchal background, whereby girls' education receives myriad gender-related challenges. Since the study was aimed at investigating the involvement of Mother Groups in the retention of girls' in primary school, the target population was both primary school girls and boys. Understanding the reasons behind girl dropout requires a comprehensive examination of the educational environment, which includes interactions with peers, teachers, and family members,

including boys. Boys' perspectives can provide insights into the broader social dynamics within schools that might contribute to girls dropping out. This is the reason why the study also sampled out sampled out boys as well in order to ensure the study captures perspectives of both girls and both. Mother Groups, head teachers/deputy head teachers and teachers were also selected to be part and parcel of the study population.

3.5 Sample and sampling techniques

On the part of quantitative study, simple random sampling was used to select sample to be used in order to collect quantitative data. According to Creswell (2009), simple random sampling is defined as a process of selecting sample which is a representative of the process in a research whereby each individual has equal probability of being selected from the population. Bryman (2008) also argues that simple random sampling is used when there is a large sample. As regard, the current study, involved a number of girls and their teachers that's why the method was used. It should be noted that the entire zone comprises 3, 486 boys and 3, 567 girls (7, 053 pupils). As such, in this study, there were many learners in all four schools hence the researcher could not select all of them. Therefore, the researcher randomly selected the learners in all schools and were used in the quantitative study. Hence, the total number of respondents that were used in the quantitative study was 70 as follows (these answered the questionnaires) 25 boys and 25 girls, 15 males and females 10 teachers and 10 members of Mother Groups respectively. On the other hand, the sample for qualitative study were 50 respondents. These are 12 boys and 12 girls (pupils) which were involved in four focus group discussions and four individual interviews from all the targeted primary schools, 11 males and 11 females from 4 Mother Groups and four teachers.

On the one hand, as one way to make the results reliable and valid, the researcher also used the register/scholastic books of pupils, and randomly select the names of the dropout pupils in order to visit them in their respective homes. These were selected using purposive sampling technique. According to Bryman (2008), purposive sampling is defined as a non-probability form of sampling. Thus, the researcher does not seek participants on a random basis. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) also asserted that in

purposive sampling, the persons chosen are not themselves representative of the population, but rather possess the necessary information about the population. In this regard, Mother Group team members and teachers were sampled purposively. To track further dropouts, the researcher used snowballing technique. Mugera (2013) defined snowball as a sampling method used by researchers to generate a pool of participants for a research study through referrals made by individuals who share a particular characteristics of research interest with the targeted population. He further argued that one of the advantages of snowball sampling is to identify potential participants whose characteristics are unique. The current study, therefore visited some of the dropout girls that are on the ground facing educational challenges.

3.6 Data Management and process methods

This research was conducted in the third week of June, 2023. As such, it was very imperative for the data to be well organized after it has been collected. Data management concerns the organization of data, from the first day to the last day of generating it. Benjamin and Miller (1999) cited in Meadows and Dodendorf (1999, p.196) note that managing data well, “facilitates interpretation just as a good orchestration facilitates good dance music”. Hence, the generated data was safely kept in different formats of soft copies such as the drop box, email inbox and flash device just to make sure that the data should not be lost.

3.7 Data Generation Methods

In order to generate the right data for the study, the researcher used a number of data sets generating methods, including interviews, FGDs, questionnaire and document analysis. These methods have been explained below.

3.7.1 Interviews

Putton (2002) argues that one of the major sources of a qualitative data is what people say through interviews. Interview can be defined as a process whereby an interviewer asks probing questions on different areas of study to respondents in order to generate data to understand the problem under study. The researcher interviewed teachers, girls (pupils),

and Mother Groups because they were the ones who were experiencing the challenges and issues under investigation. As such, the study used interview guides to collect data. According to Putton (2002), interview guides are prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed. The interviews were administered to four pupils (2 boys and 2 girls), four teachers and four Mother Group member drawn from each school.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

According to Putton (2002), a FGD entails interviewing a small group of individuals about a specific topic, characterized by participants with similar backgrounds. Typically, focus groups consist of 6 to 12 individuals who share similar experiences and possess the relevant data sought by the researcher (Razavieh et. al, 2010). Additionally, David and Sutton (2004) suggest that FGDs offer the potential for interviewees to exert greater control over the conversation, as they contribute multiple perspectives on the topic under investigation, rather than solely relying on one interviewee. Recognizing these advantages, the researcher decided to conduct FGDs alongside individual interviews and questionnaire responses. In total, four FGDs were conducted, targeting pupils and members of Mother Groups from the four schools. Each FGD lasted for 45 minutes. Consequently, the current study involved a total of 24 respondents from four primary schools (pupils), who participated in four focus group discussions, along with 22 members from Mother Groups.

3.7.3 Questionnaire

Bryman (2008) asserts that questionnaires serve as a means to gather a corpus of quantitative or quantifiable data from a sizable sample, focusing on two or more variables, which are subsequently analysed to identify patterns of association. In the present study, questionnaires were employed to complement the qualitative data derived from focus group discussions and interviews. Structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions were utilized to elicit quantitative data. A total of 56 questionnaires were disseminated among respondents from four primary schools, distributed as follows: 10 to boys and 10 to girls (20 in total), 20 to members of Mother Groups (5 from each school's Mother Group), and 16 to teachers (4 from each school). This approach aimed to enrich

the qualitative findings with quantitative insights, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.7.4 Document Analysis.

In pursuit of a thorough investigation, a diverse array of documents pertaining to girls' education was meticulously analysed. These documents encompassed various sources, including school registers, and other pertinent school records. This comprehensive approach aimed to gather a broad spectrum of information relevant to the study's focus on girls' education. By scrutinizing these documents, researchers sought to gain insights into enrolment trends, attendance patterns, academic achievements, and any prevailing challenges or barriers encountered by female students within the educational context. This extensive document analysis provided valuable context and background information, enriching the study's findings and contributing to a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding girls' education.

3. 8 Data Analysis

The study incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, necessitating distinct analytical approaches for each set of findings. Quantitative data underwent analysis using Microsoft Excel, serving as a platform to input data from all 56 questionnaires and generate graphical representations, pie charts, and frequency tables. This facilitated a systematic examination of numerical data, enabling researchers to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among variables.

Conversely, qualitative data underwent analysis utilizing NVivo software. Initially, data was captured verbatim through recording devices and subsequently transcribed. The transcribed data underwent a rigorous coding process, wherein significant themes and sub-themes were identified and categorized. Coding involved the identification of key topics, issues, similarities, and differences inherent in participants' narratives, as outlined by Sutton and Austin (2015).

Furthermore, theming was employed to synthesize the coded data, drawing connections between and among concepts to present qualitative findings in a coherent and meaningful

manner. This process involved examining the codes and delineating relationships between them, with sub-themes occasionally emerging from overarching themes. By employing these analytical techniques, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research topic, facilitating robust conclusions and insights.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Before initiating the study, the researcher obtained clearance from the UNIMA ethics committee, signalling adherence to ethical standards in data collection. Barbie (2008) contends that social research can intrude into individuals' lives by necessitating disclosure of personal information. To mitigate concerns regarding privacy, the researcher assured participants that their identities would remain anonymous throughout the study. Additionally, the rights of participants were diligently observed during data collection, with any refusal to provide information respected, and no pressure exerted to obtain it. Participants were also assured of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any juncture, preserving their autonomy and safeguarding ethical principles.

Furthermore, this study prioritized protecting participants from potential risks associated with data collection, particularly anxiety stemming from the sensitive nature of the inquiries and the possibility of exposure to COVID-19 or cholera. In response, comprehensive measures were implemented to mitigate these risks and ensure participant safety. Protective measures, such as providing hand sanitizer and face masks, were implemented, and a mandatory distance of 1.5 meters between individuals was maintained, minimizing the risk of disease transmission. By implementing these precautionary measures, the study aimed to create a secure and conducive environment for participants, prioritizing their well-being and upholding ethical standards throughout the research process.

3.10 Reliability and Validity of the study

The researcher took several measures to ensure the reliability of the study results, drawing insights from Sutton (2004), who defines reliability as the consistency of a

measurement over time. Both reliability and validity are critical aspects of any research endeavor. To achieve reliable results, it is imperative that the research instruments are valid. In this study, the researcher prioritized ensuring the validity of the interview guides and actual interviews by ensuring the clarity of the questions posed to respondents.

Following the recommendations of Sorensen, David, and Razavieh (2010), the researcher enlisted the assistance of two research assistants to conduct interviews with the same participants, thereby validating the research methods. These research assistants underwent thorough training to familiarize themselves with the questionnaire and the meaning behind the questions before administering the interviews. By employing multiple interviewers, the researcher aimed to enhance the credibility and consistency of the data collection process.

Moreover, prior to the commencement of data collection, a pilot study was conducted at three primary schools. This pilot study served to refine the questionnaire and interview guides, thereby increasing the likelihood of validity and reliability. As emphasized by Barbie (2008), piloting enables researchers to identify and rectify unclear or poorly constructed questions, ensuring the effectiveness of the research instruments. By implementing these rigorous validation measures, the researcher sought to bolster the reliability of the study findings, ultimately enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research outcomes.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a detailed exposition of the research design, approach, and methodologies to be employed in the study. It encompasses the determination of sample size, selection of sampling techniques, identification of data collection instruments, and delineation of the analytical procedures to be utilized. Additionally, Chapter three elucidates the rationale behind the selection of specific data collection tools and justifies their appropriateness for the study. Furthermore, the chapter contextualizes the discussion of results within the framework of Motherism theory complimented with learner retention theory, providing theoretical underpinnings for the interpretation of findings. This

theoretical lens enriches the analysis by offering insights into the role of women as agents of societal transformation, particularly in the context of girls' education. Through the integration of Motherism and Learner Retention theories, the discussion of results gains depth and relevance, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses results of the research findings. The presentation of the findings and ensuing discussion are aligned with the five specific research objectives, which include:

- Evaluating the perceptions of girls, boys, teachers, and head teachers regarding the involvement of Mother Groups in girls' retention in schools.
- Assessing the Mother Groups' perspectives on girls' education.
- Investigating the mechanisms implemented by Mother Groups and school staff to address the underlying issues contributing to low retention rates among girls in schools.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the mechanisms implemented by Mother Groups in addressing the aforementioned issues.
- Exploring potential strategies to retain girls in schools or mitigate factors contributing to low retention and high dropout rates among girls.

The primary aim of the study was to assess the interventions of Mother Groups in retaining girls in primary schools within the Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone, in Rumphi District. To achieve this, input was solicited from Mother Groups themselves, as well as from pupils, teachers, and head teachers.

The succeeding section presents the demographic characteristics of the research participants, offering insights into the diverse backgrounds of those involved. Subsequently, the data are organized according to the specific research objectives outlined in this study, facilitating a structured examination of the findings.

Category	Sample size					
	Male %		Female %		Total	
Mother Group	00	00	40	27.7	40	27.7
Teachers	13	9	13	9	26	18
Pupils	17	27.8	44	30.5	61	42
Drop outs	00	00	17	27.8	17	27.8
Grand total	30	20.8	114	79	144	100

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents in percentage.

Source: field work (2023).

Table 2 illustrates the demographic profiles of the respondents. The study had 144 participants, of these, 20.8% were males, and 79.2% were females.

Figure 7 presents the demographic characteristics of Mother Group members, categorized based on their academic qualifications. It is evident that the majority of Mother Group members held PSLCE as their highest qualification, with the exception of school code 002, where MSCE holders were predominant, followed by JCE holders.

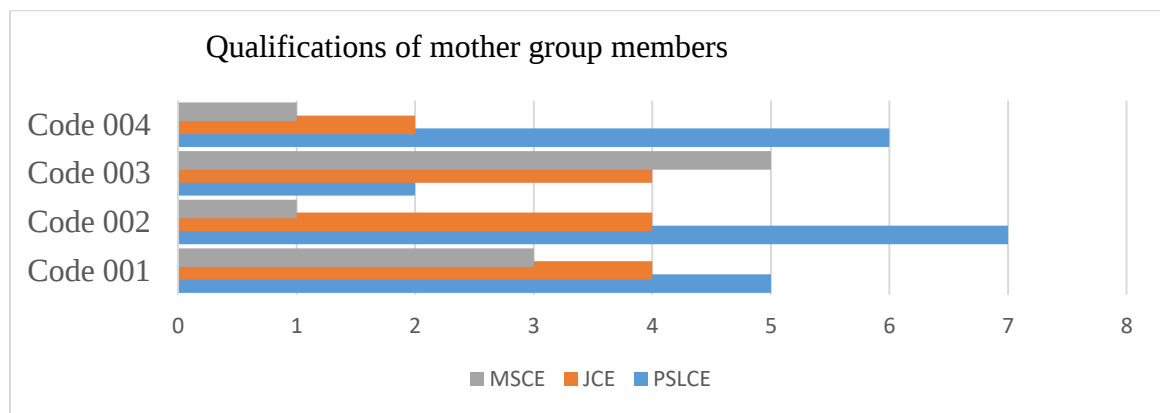
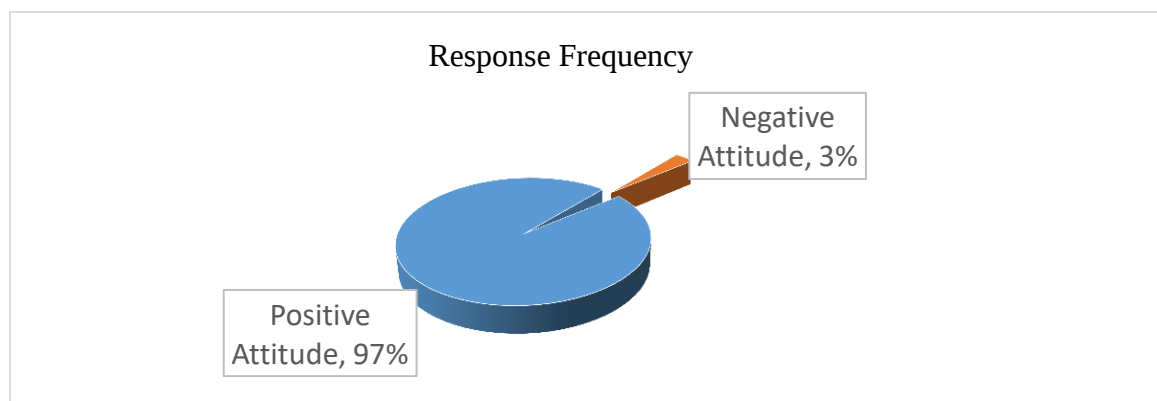


Figure 7: Qualifications of Mother Group members. Source Field work 2023

4.2 To assess the perceptions of girls, boys and teachers towards Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in schools.

The research question aimed to evaluate the perceptions of girls, boys, and teachers regarding the impact of Mother Groups' involvement in retaining girls in school. Data pertaining to this inquiry were gathered from a sample of 144 individuals, selected

through a combination of simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Given the quantitative nature of this question, data collection primarily involved the administration of a questionnaire, with responses analysed using Microsoft Excel. Tables were generated to facilitate the interpretation of the findings and address the research question effectively. Analysis of the collected data revealed a prevailing positive attitude among girls, boys, and teachers towards the involvement of Mother Groups in promoting girls' retention in schools. Both learners and educators expressed strong endorsement of the valuable contributions made by Mother Groups, as illustrated in the figure below.



Source: Researcher's analysed data from pupils and teachers in four schools, 2023

Figure 8: Response frequency.

As shown in Figure 8, the study discerned that the community, school administration, learners, and other school stakeholders all have favourable perceptions towards the Mother Group initiative. Consequently, an overwhelming 97% of the respondents highly recommended their presence, with only 3% expressing dissent.

The study further observed that the actions undertaken by the Mother Groups have catalyzed a positive shift in attitudes toward girls' education within the target communities. Both home and school environments have become increasingly supportive and conducive to girls' educational pursuits. Interviews conducted as part of the study revealed an initial disparity in parental support for education, with boys often receiving more encouragement than girls. This phenomenon was attributed to concerns regarding

early marriage or pregnancy among girls, resulting in the perceived wastage of educational investments.

However, upon closer examination, the study uncovered several instances of evidence supporting this newfound positive attitude towards girls' education. Notably, all Mother Groups in the Bumba Zone are actively collaborating with community stakeholders to advocate for girls' education and combat early marriages and teenage pregnancies. Additionally, Mother Groups have been granted opportunities to provide guidance and counselling services to girls within the community. Families have begun to reduce the workload assigned to girls at home, allowing them more time to focus on their studies. Furthermore, there has been a notable increase in support and commitment to ensuring the completion of primary schooling for girls. Some noteworthy developments include boys emerging as allies to girls, parents extending educational support to both genders, and communities assisting Mother Groups in mobilizing local resources to provide for the educational needs of disadvantaged girls, including school fees and supplies like exercise books.

However, studies conducted in other areas have shown that commitment to promoting girls' education, including the Mother Groups is lacking. For instance, Davison et al (2010), their study's findings revealed that gender structuring results is seen in the way resources within a family are distributed; and girls are to clean the home, perform other domestic works and save the money hence, the Mother Group involvement could be regarded as waste of resources. In addition, Taban's (2010) study findings revealed that in Northern Tororo in Tanzania people demean women in social life and placing priority on girls, hence Mother Groups' involvement to them is seen as something insignificant. Furthermore, Sohoo & Klasen (2018), study's findings in West Africa indicated that parents, unless wealthy, preferred to educate their sons on the assumption that education "pays off" in boy's life time through wages and salaries because males are paid more handsomely than females. In line of this, FAWA (2016) in Zambia, also found that girl-child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through childhood into

adulthood such that they include unequal access, poor performance, early drop-out, and low enrolment in schools hence Mother Groups are regarded as insignificant.

4.3 To assess the Mother Group perceptions towards girls' education.

The second objective was to assess the Mother Groups' perceptions towards girls' education. This was aimed at determining how attitudes of Mother Group members affect the rate of girls' retention in primary school. The study noted a trend that if schools accommodate Mother Groups well, school dropout rate might be reduced amongst the girls. This is despite the fact that there are other variables which also play a role in promoting high retention rate amongst the girls. Quantitative data collected from the Mother Groups revealed that all members of the groups have a positive perception towards girls' education. Evidently, the findings indicate that out of 100% of the respondents 95% conceded that Mother Groups have right perceptions towards girls' education as the below frequency data depicts. However, it is also seen that a lesser percentage (5%) of the participants argued against the view that Mother Groups have right perception towards girls' education.

Table 2: Mother Groups' perception towards girls' education

Category	Frequency	Percentages %
Right perception	19	95
Wrong perception	01	4.7

Source: Researcher's analysed data from Mother Groups in all four groups. 2023.

Qualitatively, the study established that Mother Group members have positive perception towards girls' education. For instance, during personal interviews as well as FGDs members of the Mother Groups expressed their commitment towards girls' education. Most of the members commented that;

“We work together with community members where we joined this initiative. Together, we make follow-up on child marriages and pregnancies where we encourage teen mother to report back to school. So

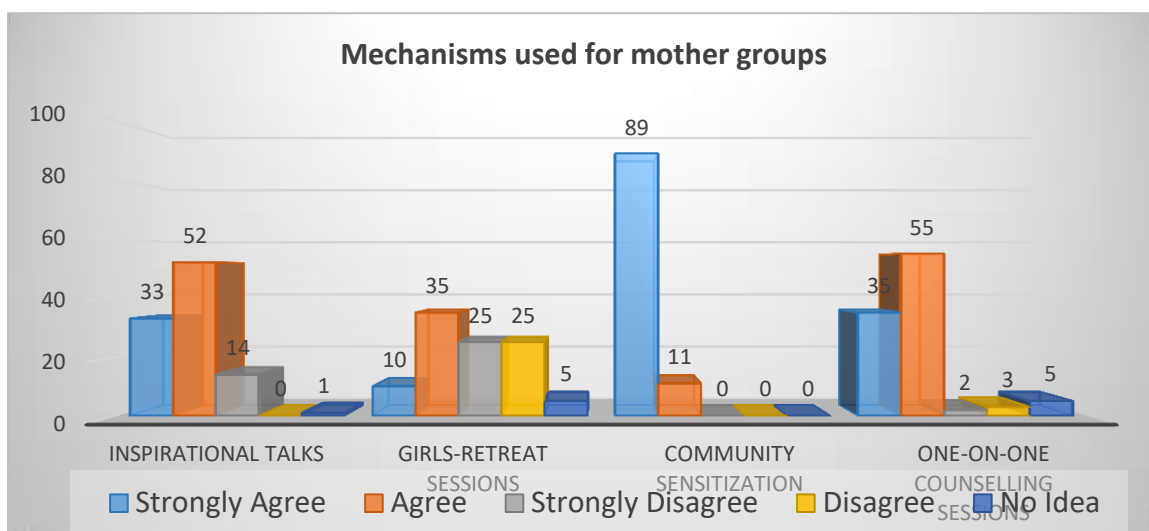
far, this year, we have facilitated the return to school of a good number of girls.”

The study noted that Mother Group members are geared to assist girls in their studies. It was revealed that Mother Group members serve as role models, counsel girls on how to resist pressures to drop out. In addition, the head-teachers also commented, “that the Mother Group members have shown their commitment to take care of the girls.

Having explored the perception of Mother Groups towards girls' education, the study now shifts focus towards examining the mechanisms implemented by these groups to address the underlying issues contributing to the low retention of girls in schools.

4.4 To investigate the mechanisms which have been put in place by the Mother Groups as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute low retention amongst girls in schools.

The research question sought to investigate the mechanisms which have been put in place by the Mother Groups as well as the school administration as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute to low retention amongst girls in schools. In order to tackle this objective, the study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected from 60 respondents using a questionnaire while qualitative data were collected from 84 respondents. The study found out that there are a number of mechanisms that have been put in place by the Mother Groups. These mechanisms were put into categories according to their level of significance.



Source: Researcher's analysed data from pupils and teachers in four schools, 2023.

Figure 9: Mechanisms used for Mother Groups

The study found out that Mother Groups in all four primary schools have similar mechanisms which they use to curb the cross-cutting issues that fuel low retention rate, high school dropout rate and high repetition rate amongst girls in their schools. In order to quantify the findings, figure 9 above has shown these mechanisms in their level of importance as; strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree and no idea.

4.4.1 Mechanisms put in place by the Mother Groups

4.4.1.1 Inspirational Talks:

The study findings indicated that Mother Groups arrange for local citizens who have gone through a hard life and are successful in society to speak, especially school graduates or retirees from various fields. As commented by members of Mother Groups,

“During these sessions, several role models from other sectors of society such as Health, Agriculture and NGOs are invited to the event to share their life histories and personal experiences. These are deemed to offer further motivation for all girls. The success stories of these citizens serve as a great motivation for many learners to harness resilience in relation to the challenges they face in school” (Mother Group 003, 21st June, 2023)

In order to quantify the effectiveness of the approach used, “inspirational talks”, 33% of the respondents stated "strongly agree" and 52% of the respondents stated "agree". While 14 % of the respondents did not agree either of the two first opinions. In the light of these findings, it can be said that inspirational talks approach helps to reduce school dropout rate, increase retention rate and reduce repetition rate amongst girls in school. This is also in total agreement with what Philemoni and Mkulu (2020) found in their end line survey that motivational talks contributed to supportive environments to girls’ education both at home and school. There are other studies in the literature that support this view; for instance MacDonald (2017), argued that inspirational talks help to motivate learners to love their academic studies hence reduce dropout amongst them, Murugu (2014), also found that one of the alternative measures to cut the challenge of dropout amongst girls is to use resourceful persons to infuse personal curiosity in girls for their studies.

4.4.1.2 Girls-retreat sessions

The study noted that Mother Groups sometimes have girls-retreat sessions where they spend some days about two to three days during weekends with all school girls. The findings show that during these sessions, all girl pupils are brought together to allow extended time for the girls to explore personal issues more in-depth and intimately with counsellors of Mother Groups. On this approach “Girls-retreat sessions” the study also used likert ranking, which aimed to quantitatively evaluate the views of the respondents on its effectiveness. 10% of the respondents stated “strongly agree” and 35% stated “agree”. On the other hand, 25% of the respondents stated “strongly disagree” and another 25% of the respondents also stated 25 “disagree” while 5% of them stated “no ideal”. In the light of these findings, it can be said that girls-retreat sessions approaches have some influences on the reducing of school dropout rate, increase retention rate and reducing repetition rate amongst girls in school though the scores were below compared with those who did not agree. There are studies in the literature that support this view (Murugu, 2014; Davison et al, 2010; Wilson, 2010; Taban, 2010; Aurela, 2011 and Munene, 2013).

4.4.1.3 Community sensitization

It was also established that Mother Groups had several community awareness campaigns to sensitize about the need of supporting girl's education. Kumar et al (2020) argued that partnering with communities is fundamental to achieving real and lasting change because it enhances a sense of ownership in the community members where community members feel they own the process, they invest more to ensure success of the process. During community sensitization, Mother Groups encourage parents and the communities at large to send back adolescent mothers to school and those who have married before the age of eighteen. When the views of the respondents on the "community sensitization" were examined, 89% of the respondents stated strongly agreed that community sensitization is necessary and 11% of the respondents stated that they "agree".

In the light of this view, JPGE (2017b), also alluded that community sensitization helps to strengthen the zeal and commitment of the villagers to perform their role of ensuring that girls remain in school. In addition, Sharma (2016) concurs by asserting that community involvement facilitates the identification of community specific education issues and informs the development of strategies to remove barriers to access, and quality in education within a given community especially to girl-child education. This is also in total agreement with what Nyirongo and Chulu (2021), found in their end line survey that sensitization of parents at home contributed to supportive environments to girls' education both at home and school. Furthermore, Mansuri & Rao (2012), recommends that for community structures to be effective, the Education Ministry should put in place documented guidelines which aim at enhancing girls' education in order to improve education delivery through community participation.

4.4.1.4 One-on-one counselling sessions

As seen on the Figure 9 above, 35% of the respondents stated "strongly agree", 55% of the respondents on the one hand, also stated "agree". Only a minor percentage stated "strongly disagree" (2%), "disagree" (3%) and "no idea" (5%). On this the study established that Mother Groups arrange counselling sessions each term. The idea behind is to give psychosocial support to the adolescent pupil mothers together with other pupil

girls. In addition, this study also noted that one-on-one counselling approach has helped to strengthen girls' resilience, reflect on their mistakes, unlearn vices and learn new behaviours and morals that also contribute to fuller academic engagements. There are studies in the literature that support this view (Davison et al, 2010; Wilson, 2010; Taban, 2010; Aurela, 2011 and Nyabanyaba, 2008). To confirm the findings, the aforementioned assertion was also echoed by teachers who explained that;

“With one-on-one counselling approach, the Mother Group helps girls re-establish relationships with their parents, strengthen resilience and improve their ability to cope with difficult situations. Hence, we have seen girls become better at identifying dangerous and risky situations and are better able to excel in life”, (Code 002 school teachers on 22nd June, 2023)

Furthermore, the study noted that the psychosocial support (mechanisms used to reduce dropout amongst girls or increase retention amongst girls in school) for adolescent mothers provided by members of Mother Groups in all four schools also seemed to reduce negative behaviour of adolescent student mothers and this seemed to reduce the chances that participating adolescent pupil mothers would become school dropouts. This was also found by CSEC (2014), in their studies that psychosocial support offered during guidance and counselling of the teenagers helps to mitigate the challenge of school dropout.

On the one hand, one of the teachers also commented that,

“I have observed that one-on-one counselling services benefit the re-admitted pupils by lowering their stress, anxiety, depression, and enhancing their self-esteem”.

Another member of a Mother Group shared similar sentiments that;

“The psychosocial support that girl pupils receive through inspirational talks, one-on-one counselling sessions and girls retreat sessions from members of Mother Groups during the entirety of each academic term

becomes the support on which they lean, build their lives around and use to contribute to their school's routine activities. What Mother Group does is to contribute to building a lifestyle of empathy, interactivity and kindness which ensures that re-admitted girl pupils feel included, inspired and motivated to continue learning as before'', (Mother Group 002, 23rd June, 2023).

The study findings indicate that psychosocial support for adolescent girls can contribute to opportunities beyond education. Nyirongo and Chulu (2021), argued that addressing root attitudes and norms around adolescent girls and their education is critical. Hence, it was found that because of the involvement of Mother Groups on the retention of girls in school the girls have now developed and enhanced competencies such as resilience, self-awareness, collaboration, empathy, and respect; these qualities are important in many aspects of life. This was also found by Nyabanyaba (2008), who argued that with psychosocial support, girls in school gain self-esteem that help them to face the real-life situation.

4.4.2 Provision of guidance and counselling services.

Findings from interviews and the review of literature showed that availability of guidance and counselling service is critical in making adolescent mothers return to school, remain in school until they complete their studies, learn effectively and excel in their studies. Further interviews with adolescent mothers revealed that guidance and counselling services helped them to make important decisions that have restored their hopes as one teenage mother explained;

“When I was expelled from school due to pregnancy, my father was very angry at me and did not want to see me at home. Everybody was pointing a finger at me. I thought that was the end of my life. But when I met the Mother Group, they advised me what to do in times like these. Such advice helped me to start thinking that being expelled from school was not the end of life. Right from there, I deliberated that after birth I must go back

to school to continue with my studies” (FGDs, Code 001 School on 21st June, 2023).

In the interview with a chairperson of one Mother Group she explained:

“When you become pregnant while you’re a pupil and the one who made you pregnant has ran away, you become frustrated. You don’t know where to start. I am thankful for the government for starting counselling services through Mother Group initiative, counselling helps where to start”, (FGDs, Mother Group 001 on 24th June, 2023).

The sentiments above reveal that adolescent mothers experience several difficulties that call for guidance and services to help them to return to school and study effectively while at the same time fulfil the responsibility of taking care of their children. To this end, Mother Group offers guidance and counselling services to help girls to make right choices of educational programmes that make their careers and address their existing challenges. It is apparent from these findings that girls receive some support for their education. However, it was noted that the support they receive is not adequate enough to cater for all of their educational requirements. For example, it was noted that other adolescent mothers were unable to get back to school due to lack of financial support. This has implications for policy making and preparation of guidelines on how the education of adolescent mothers should be supported. This agrees with Birungi’s (2015) argument that the lack of an unclear policy is the essence of limitations in the provision of education to adolescent mothers. Therefore, the study established that psychosocial support including counselling is very critical to support girls’ education.

4.5 To assess the impact of the mechanisms which have been put in place by Mother Groups.

The forth specific objective aimed at assessing the impact of the mechanisms set apart by Mother Groups as a way of combating the challenges that encumber girls’ education. Quantitative data collected from the Mother Groups, pupils and teachers revealed that the mechanisms which were put in place by the Mother Groups have really helped to raise

the bar of retention rate amongst the girls in schools, reduced the school dropout rate amongst girls, brought back to school those (some) who dropped off from their studies due to teenage pregnancies and early marriages as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The Impact of the Mechanisms on Girls' Education

No	Impact of mechanisms used by Mother Groups	Frequency		Frequency	
		False	%	True	%
01	High school dropout rate amongst the girls in schools has not been reduced	55	91.6	5	8.3
02	Retention rate of the girls has been increased	10	16.6	50	83.3
03	The spirit of assertiveness and perseverance amongst the girls in schools has been rekindled.	20	33.3	40	66.6
04	Communities have been fully sensitized to support girls' education.	0	0	60	100
05	Male teachers have been encouraged to support girls' education just as their counterparts (boys).	15	25	45	75
06	A good number of girls who dropped out from their studies have now come back to school.	5	8.3	55	91.6

Source: Researcher's analysed data from pupils, teachers and Mother Groups, 2023

As seen in Table 3 above, the Mother Groups intervention has positively impacted the girls' education in various ways. For instance, it is shown that the communities surrounding the sampled schools are fully sensitized with the need of supporting girls' education hence 100%. The study noted that mobilizing the community is very paramount in as far as girls' education is concerned. This is also supported by the research conducted by Wilson (2010) which found that the movement of social mobilization at the community level helps to improve the quality of education and the educational equality between girls and boys.

Besides, it is also indicated that high school dropout rate amongst girls in schools has been reduced hence 91% rejected that the Mother Group intervention has not reduced the school dropout rate. This is in contradiction with MoEST assessment report (2018-2019), which argued that primary school level in Malawi is 50% of the total enrolment, but this

decreases to below 40% as they ascend academic ladder to secondary level and further below 30% in tertiary level. It seems that the Mother Group interventions have trimmed the dire situation of girls' education in terms of school dropout and the gap has been lowered compared to 2018 and 2019 report.

On re-admission of girls, 91.6% of the respondents indicated that the initiative has helped to bring back some girls who dropped out of their studies to school. On retention rate, 83.3% of the respondents agreed that the Mother Group intervention has helped to retain more girls in schools and also their performance has been enhanced for the better. This does not align with Oywa (2019) and Mekonnen (2017), research findings, which found that though the Ministry of Education uses parental involvement in Kenya to lower down the retention of pupils in schools, Suba District continues to register one of the poorest retention rates of girls, saying that even among the few girls who are retained, their performance is wanting. While the latter, Mekonnen (2017), also found that although the Ethiopian educational policy tries to advocate parental involvement in the management of primary schools for improving educational quality at its level and through obtaining better family school governance experiences, parents were not actively participating in their children's learning endeavours and school principals and PTA chairpersons did not seem to appreciate the possible advantages that could emanate from complete parental involvement in the management of elementary schools.

On the other hand, quantitatively it is also shown that due to Mother Group intervention the spirit of assertiveness and perseverance (66.6%) has been increased. It was noted that the Mother Groups use a variety of methods. Members of Mother Groups explained;

‘‘Mother Group members explain the importance of education, serve as role models, and arrange referrals for reproductive health services. They counsel girls on how to resist pressures to drop out. Some girls face pressure from their own parents to quit school, especially if they are married and their husbands help to support their parents’’.

In addition, the head-teachers also commented,

“that the mothers show girls how to care for themselves, including how to make sanitary pads out of scraps of cloth which can be washed and re-used”, (Mother Group 004, 24th June, 2023)

Additionally, 45% of the respondents also agreed that the initiative has helped to influence the male teachers to start supporting girls' education just as they do with boys. However, there is still need for more efforts for the retention rate to be raised. Hence, 10% of respondents rejected that the Mother Group intervention has reduced the low retention rate amongst the girls in school. On the one hand, 5% of the respondents also rejected that the Mother Group intervention has reduced the school dropout rate of the girls in school and 33.3% of the respondents have further rejected that the Mother Group initiative helps the girls to have the spirit of assertiveness and perseverance. The study noted that the Mother Group initiative has helped to curb some challenges that fuel the low retention rate, high repetition rate and high school dropout amongst girls in all four primary schools. However, it seems also that some challenges that fuel the problem of low retention rate and school dropout especially for the girls are still not rectified or resolved. On the other hand, the study established that one of the challenges that is still remained is the gap between the Mother Groups and the school administration i.e. the collaboration due to level of education in some schools was observed as a challenge. This is supported by Epstein study (2015), who argued that schools should plan on how to involve parents in their endeavours so that it could be a parameter to be used in order to create an additional partnership into their children's learning.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that Mother Groups are to some extent doing tremendous work in improving retention of girls in school. On this perspective, the study noted that keeping girls in school or bring back girls to schools after they have dropped out from their studies is requires considerable effort. It was observed that teenage pregnancy leads to a range of psychological problems including depression, mood swings and suicidal thoughts. During the interviews teachers commented that pregnant teens feel estranged from their classmates. One teacher explained;

“My log of critical incidents in my teaching career so far indicates that girls who have been re-admitted appear somewhat ‘withdrawn’ during lessons and do not fully and actively participate in lesson activities, they usually appear ‘lost’ during the length of the lesson activities” (Code 4 school, 21st June, 2023)

This also transpired during the FGDs when some Mother Group members commented that teenage pregnancy becomes a great disruption to girls’ schooling in Malawi, and some do not get back to school once they have given birth. This is also echoed by UNICEF (2020), which found out that adolescent motherhood is oftentimes unplanned, and adolescent student mothers are subjected to many psychosocial challenges. They further elaborated that some pupil mothers do not go back to school. Additionally, stigma and abuse from fellow students, teachers and support staff very often causes stress and worry in girls that go back to school after dropping out due to pregnancy. The study noted that this reduces the likelihood of these young women excelling academically and realising their potential.

The aforementioned opinion was also supported by one of the deputy teachers during an interview and she explained:

“from my teaching experience spanning seven years, I have noted that the challenges for pregnant teenagers include inability to concentrate in class, inability to organise themselves for studies, low self-esteem, self-isolation and family conflicts, which all ultimately affect their intrinsic motivation to effectively engage in academic work” (Code 002, 21st June 2023)

It is against this background that psychosocial support for such girl pupils as that provided through Mother Group is an intervention strategy for addressing these problems.

4.5.1 Mother Group intervention on girls’ school drop outs.

The study noted that the mechanisms put in place by the Mother Groups as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute to low retention of girls in schools or obstruct the progress of girls’ education, have also helped to bring back some girls who

dropped out from their studies to school. In order to quantify the findings, the researcher interviewed both the drop outs who have been brought back to schools after some time by the Mother Groups and those who have never been brought back to school.

Table 4: Dropouts – pupil returnees and non-returnees from 2019 - 2022

Name of school	Number of dropouts who have returned to school	Percentage	Number of dropouts who have never returned to school	Percentage
Code 001	35	53.8	11	12.3
Code 002	15	17.6	7	7.5
Code 003	13	14.9	9	9.8
Code 004	20	25	10	11.1
Mean	20.7	26.1 (72)	9.2	10.1 (28)

Source: Pupils' Register book.

From Table 5 above, the percentage of those who dropped out of school and never came back to their studies is smaller as compared to those who managed to come back to their studies. For example, the study has revealed that out of the total number of dropouts, only 10.1 representing 28 percent did not come back though they were once being persuaded by the Mother Group members while 26.1 representing 72 percent they had come back to school. The results seem to suggest that if Mother Groups are given more support, there is high probability that more girls would be able to come back to school. Subsequently, more girls would be able to remain in schools for their studies. The study sought to examine differential outcomes or effects for girls (who were receiving support through the initiative) in comparison with their male counterparts. Statistical analysis using dropout data as indicated above more learners reported to have come back to school, the number of those who reported that they did not go back to school was less. Therefore, Mother Group intervention seemed to reduce the risk of dropping out of school.

In addition, the study sought to identify unearth factors that make girls drop out of school. The figure 11 below shows the reasons why these pupils dropped off from their studies.

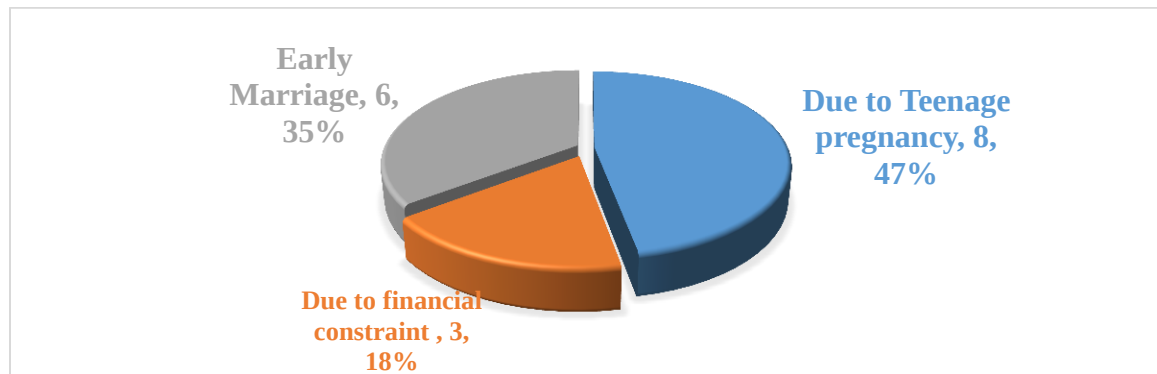


Figure 10: Reasons for dropping out of school

From Figure 10 above, girls' education progress in Malawi is reported to be obstructed due to a number of factors including; teenage pregnancies, financial constraint and early marriages. This is in line with the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) of 2015 shows that some 42 percent of girls in Malawi are married while still children, some 29 percent of girls aged 15-19 have already begun childbearing. Mzuza et al. (2014), also attested that girls could get married as early as in Standard 1 and 2 and become pregnant as early as Standard 2. Despite the efforts of Mother Groups, the research study noted that there are some major challenges facing adolescent mothers hence, some never return to school. For instance, during interviews with the dropouts these were their major concerns were mentioned, as one of the dropouts explained;

“I did not go back to school because am afraid of being given demeaning nick names by my fellow students, I also find myself difficult in balancing school activities and motherhood”.

In addition, from another school one of the dropouts also said,

“am afraid of being viewed as a bad influence on others, on the one hand, am also afraid of being stigmatized by my fellow school mates, so I cannot go back to school”

The research findings indicate that feelings of shattered dreams, being given demeaning nick names by fellow students, difficulty in balancing school activities and motherhood, reduced financial support from parents, fear of being viewed as a bad influence on others, covert stigmatization by school mates, friends, and community resulting into negative attitudes towards them, are among the major challenges facing adolescent mothers in school. This is in total agreement with what Gyesaw and Ankomah (2013), argued that being an adolescent mother is associated with school dropout, unemployment, poverty and poor nurturing results for the birthed babies. As it is also argued by Nyirongo and Chulu (2021), that the school environment promoted stigma as students and teachers taunted the teenage mothers. Bermea, Toews and Wood (2016) also found that adolescent mothers reported feeling stigmatized by school personnel and their non-parenting classmates within. At home, they would not get child minders to take care of their babies so that the young mothers can attend school. In addition, Mkamanga, Ndala and Chigeda (2022) also found that cultural factors obstruct girls to go back to their schools after they give birth. However, Mother Group provided inspirational talks, one-on-one counselling sessions and small group discussions which helped participating adolescent mothers with staying in school after being re-admitted and remaining focused on their academic progress. Also, the group assists adolescent pupil mothers with developing communication and social skills and strengthening their abilities to accept criticism from others and express themselves regarding their issues. It seems that the support received by the pupil-mothers may be an important factor in decreasing the dropout rate as observed on the above returnees' data. This was not the case previously as USAID (2014), argued that due to lack of documented guidelines and procedures for re-admission program, about 53% girls were still dropped out of school even after their readmission.

In addition, Mother Group members also share their own life histories with participating adolescent mothers. The shared experience of the adolescent mothers are best summarised by one of the members as follows;

“....when I was found with pregnancy Mother Group members started supporting me morally to give me strength and resilience as thoughts of suicide emerged in me. Soon after I gave birth, my parents were extremely furious and my mother cried. But my grandmother encouraged me to go back to school and to start using family planning to avoid another occurrence. Mother Group members managed to cool my parents down and their love and support started slowly....” (Mother Group 003, 24th June 2023)

Additionally, all the adolescent mothers interviewed explained that the news and knowledge of their pregnancies had a very disturbing impact not only on their normal psychological wellbeing, but also on their relationships with their parents and siblings. One pupil stated:

“.... I failed to hide my pregnancy. Being an adolescent, the fact of having a pregnancy was so much frustrating and not believable. Guilt, shame, emotional and mental distress took control of me and the thoughts of suicide started knocking’. But members of Mother Group helped me to recover from this thickness through their counselling”, (Pupil interviews @ Code 001 school, 24th June, 2023)

The study established that the Mother Group initiative has the objectives which include: to ensure enrolment, retention and completion of education by girls, to raise awareness of communities on cultural practices that have adverse impact on girls’ education, to promote amicable interpersonal relationship between mothers and daughters, to advocate for hygiene, to provide counselling to in and out of school children with focus on girls, to ensure availability and adequacy of hygienic sanitation facilities especially for girls, to ensure teachers’ discipline, incidents of child abuse and all forms of sexual harassment and to conduct income generating activities for supporting girls’ education. In the light of these objectives, it can be concluded that the Mother Groups have a purpose driven force which helps them to be focused and spend their resources judiciously and timely.

4.5.2 Challenges faced by adolescent mothers and Mother Groups success stories

The study noted that in T/A Chikulamayembe, negative perceptions of adolescent mothers appear to be a major underlying factor in the challenges adolescent mothers face. All the adolescent mothers interviewed in this study felt right from the initial pregnancy news that they were handled and treated as outcasts, as familiar strangers in their own homes and as perpetrators of shame on their parents. In the light of this view, the psychosocial support for adolescent mothers provided by members of Mother Groups seemed to reduce negative behaviour of adolescent pupil mothers and this seemed to reduce the chances that participating adolescent pupil mothers would become school dropouts. This agrees with the reviewed policy which is now providing a room for effective counselling and guidance services to the girls who become pregnant while in school to deal with stigma, discrimination and other psychosocial issues, making both the school and home environments more accommodating (MOEST, 2017). One of the teachers said, *‘Mother Group program benefited the mental health of adolescent pupil mothers by lowering their stress, anxiety, depression, and enhancing their self-esteem’*.

Besides, the study also noted that community leaders within the targeted areas in T/A Chikulamayembe in order to promote girls’ education they have passed by-laws. This view was also echoed during the interviews with members of Mother Group that in order to demonstrate their support toward girls’ education, traditional leaders from the communities living around target schools came up with by-laws that protected girls from dropping out of schools because of teenage pregnancies and early marriages. They also added that non-compliance to such by-laws attracts punitive sanctions on the perpetrators. Based on the statistical data, this Mother Group support for girls’ schooling likely influences a girls’ persistence and achievement in school.

Furthermore, the study also noted that at the school level, Mother Group work hand-in-hand with school administrations, Parents Teachers Association (PTAs), School Management Committee (SMCs), Village Development committee (VDC), Area Development Committee (ADCs), and traditional chiefs. It was further noted that their

idea of working alongside of the aforementioned village structures and other social interventions is to build their capacity to support schools create friendly learning environments and safe spaces for girls within and outside the schools. As such, the study has seen the future of Mother Group initiative, thus working with local structures can help to foster sustainability of the program. In light of this view, most members of the Mother Groups argued that a key investment that their organization is currently striving to make in all its programming work is to build sustainability of initiatives to the extent possible. In addition, one of the members said, *“we believe that sustainability is guaranteed when local institutions and communities are involved in supporting the initiative from the beginning”*.

In addition, the study also established that in rural Malawi, a girl has limited opportunities. Unlike boys, girls are faced with pressure for marriage as soon as they become teenagers. Members from the group explained that some of the learners who married after being impregnated by their fellow learners have returned to their schools. They had few options and ended up married to the fathers of their babies. One of the pupils explained;

“I was in standard eight when I got pregnant for my boyfriend. Back home my parents forced me to marry since they could not afford taking care of the pregnancy. When the Mother Group visited my parents, they convinced them that I need to be in school. So after giving birth I returned to school and I am now in form one at Chankhomi Community day secondary school”.

This also transpired during one-on-one interviews with the chairperson at Mother Group 001 center:

“I work together with community members where I joined the Mother Group. Together, we make follow-up on child marriages and pregnancies where we encourage teen mother to report back to school. So far, this year, we have facilitated the return to school of ten girls. She continued saying that “with the initiative, we have seen that more girls

now remain in school unlike before. Previously a lot of girls dropped out of school before sitting for national examinations, but today we have a slight improvement owing to the initiative by Mother Group, although the battle is still on especially that adolescent mothers are facing pressure when they are back to school”, (Mother Group 001, 24th June, 2023)

The study noted that along with the village headmen, the school administration, citizen forum, MESIP, Save the Children, Action Aid, Chikulamayembe Women’s forum and other community members, Mother Groups’ efforts have also been instrumental in ensuring very low rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in their communities in order to boost up the retention rate in schools especially for girls. Here the implication is that Mother Groups can be important agents of change, with the capacity to enhance awareness and using their voices, leadership and influence to make progress for girls’ education.

The study found that the Mother Groups have extra layers of support to the community’s School Management Committees and PTA to support girls’ schooling in all four sampled primary schools. The participants are drawn from the surrounding villages of the sampled schools in T/A Chikulamayembe. In addition, the study also noted that the groups provide a range of services, including financial support for the neediest of the girls through fundraising activities such as farming, membership contributions and fines. One of the Mother Group members during the interviews explained;

“Mother Group seeks to enable girls who have dropped out to complete their education and to ensure that all girls are in school and are learning. Their role is to ensure girls remain in school and complete their education in addition to providing sexual and reproductive health information hence found alternate ways of raising funds for their activities ”, (Mother Group 004, 24th June, 2023)

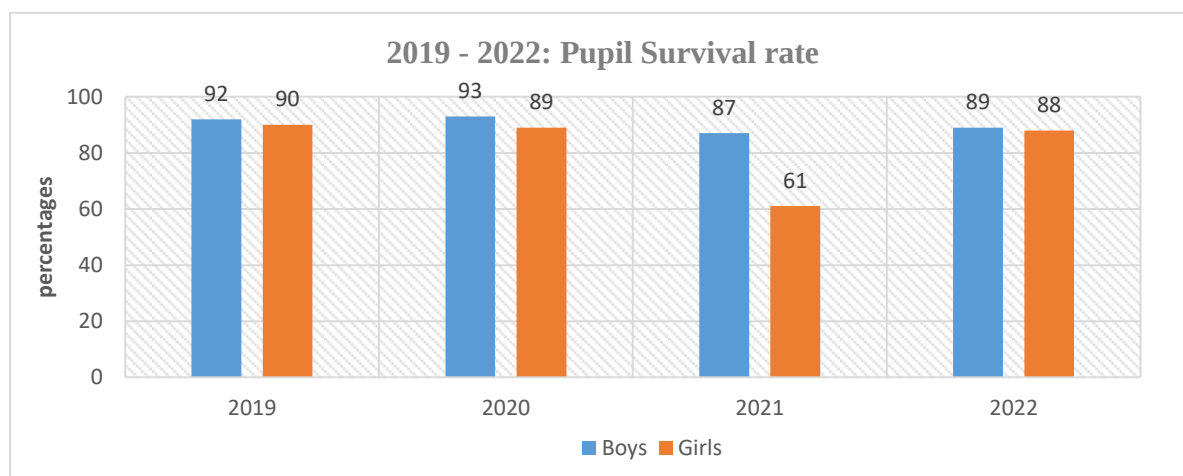
Besides, another lady said:

“I have been performing their role since 2015 and I find it rewarding because I have seen girls returning to school and completing their education”. She cites examples of girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy but they are now back to school.

In line with this, UNICEF (2020), argued that keeping girls in school is critical. One of the head-teachers also added that:

“‘Mother Groups’ involvement on the retention of girls in school is seen very critical, hence to keeping girls from marrying early and being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence is very cumbersome and it requires the spirit of tenacity”.

Furthermore, the study established that the Mother Group intervention has promoted girls’ education in one way or the other. Figure 11 illustrates how the Mother Groups have helped to raise the bar of girls’ survival rate.



Source: Researcher’s analysed data from four schools, 2023.

Figure 11: Pupil survival rate

Figure 11 above compares survival rates of boys and girls between 2019 and 2022. Survival rate has remained relatively high and similar for both boys and girls except for year 2021 where 61% for girls. Kidman, Breton, Behrman & Kohler (2022), in their study on impact of COVID 19 on girls and boys return to school argue that more boys than girls returned to school after the pandemic. The current study also identified similar

picture in the sampled schools. The situation improved in 2022 with a girl survival rate of 88%. However, despite the drops, the findings of this study show that the survival rate is far much better in the sampled schools than the national picture which per UNFPA only 25% of female learners complete primary school (UNFPA, 2019). Nearly 60% drop out for a variety of reasons related to poverty, lack of motivation, poor sanitary facilities and 15% leave school specifically because of pregnancy and early marriage. This study used dropout rate, retention rate, survival rate and repetition rate as indicators to assess Mother Group intervention if their involvement adds value to girls' education. The study reviewed data that suggested that the support provided by Mother Groups to pupils (such as psychosocial support, role modelling, sanitary pads, life skills and other activities) helped to keep girls in schools and avoid dropout.

However, most of the women in these villages are functionally illiterate, and the Mother Group members work as volunteers; one of the teachers was concerned about it and she said, '*it is important to support the Mother Group members with regular trainings and finances since they work voluntarily*'. This is emphasised by JPGE (2017b), who reported that in other place like in Salima and Dowa districts that through the UN Joint programme on girls' education, UNFPA has been strengthening the capacity and technical skills of Mother Groups to perform their role of ensuring that girls remain in school. However, the study noted that operations of the Mother Groups in Rumphi district are not further progressing further due to financial constraints. Hence, their capacity and technical skills are not strengthened.

4.5.3 Factors affecting Mother Group endeavours

Table 5: Factors affecting Mother Group explained by mothers, teachers & pupils.

(N=144)

SN	Factors affecting Mother Group	Frequencies	Per cent
01	Lack of leadership	75	52
02	Lack of clear objectives, goals and aims	23	15.9
03	Lack of regular trainings/ capacity building	100	69.4

04	Poor financial support	135	93.8
05	Lack of mentorship from the government	88	61.1
06	Lack of parental encouragement	40	27.7
07	Poor collaboration or coordination within the team	69	47.9

The findings of this study also revealed that the Mother Groups are faced by several challenges as summarized in Table 5 above. Poor financial support topped the list with 93.8% of the respondents agreeing that this is a major problem. Others included lack of capacity building and mentorship from government. Mentorship is very critical in the effective operation of Mother Groups as it has can help increase confidence of the group members (Nyirongo & Chulu, 2021). Majority of the respondents did not think that the Mother Groups have objectives, goals and aims that are not clear, only 15.9% of the respondents thought otherwise. These challenges have a number of effects on the operations of the Mother Groups. One such effect that this study found out was that Mother Groups do not have regular meetings to track progress of their achievements based on their specific program goals/objectives. The Mother Groups in Rumphi district need government support to mitigate these bottlenecks. Support could come in the form trainings in role of Mother Groups, leadership, governance and resource mobilization.

4.6 To explore possible strategies that can be used to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate.

The fifth objective aimed at exploring possible strategies that can be used to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate. The study collected qualitative data only in exploring possible strategies to prevent retention.

4.6.1 Life skills training programmes

It was suggested that the Mother Group initiative should provide the girls with general life skills as part of enhancing retention rate. These programmes can help to address issues related to their personal development, self-concept, self-esteem, self-awareness and their role or place in life. As commented by one member of a Mother Group

“...life skills training help our girls realise their potential ...because they would also be equipped with guidance and counselling services on issues affecting their studies, personal lives and career development”, (Mother Group 001, 19th June, 2023).

Research has shown that indeed life skills training programs are effective interventions for enhancing the educational outcomes of female learners, particularly in terms of retention in schools. In their study on effectiveness of skills training for a CAMFED project in Tanzania, Morris, Hardy & Zivetz (2017) as cited in Hannahan, Robinson, & Kwauk (2021) found that participation of girls in life skills training significantly improved retention rates. Furthermore, life skills training has been recognized as an effective psychosocial intervention strategy for fostering positive social and mental health outcomes among adolescents. Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma (2017) reiterate that life skills training plays a pivotal role in various aspects, including strengthening coping strategies and building self-confidence, these are key aspects that can help cope with school environment challenges, and therefore remain in school.

4.6.2 Establishment of learners’ clubs.

In addition, it was also suggested that the Mother Groups should set up learners’ clubs to provide safe spaces for learners to engage and discuss various issues affecting them. These are crucial for the involvement of the adolescent boys and girls in management of issues that affect their education.

As stated by one respondent

“Boys and girls have a very big role to play in managing their education, including making their voice heard. They need a space where they can freely discuss their issues. Affecting both, girl and boys. Something like a club or whatever name we choose to call it”, (Respondent from a Mother Group 19th June, 2023).

The general idea is that these clubs would create platforms for the adolescent girls and boys to discuss a wide range of issues such as those that relate to sexual harassment, equal treatment of boys and girls in schools, abuse of adolescents by teachers, creation of environment conducive for adolescent mothers to go back to school and issues related to the rights of the adolescents in general. The proposal to create clubs for learners has proven to bring about improvements in learner retention in various places (Msukwa & Amulike, (2013). Furthermore, Kece (2015) states that involvement in clubs helps fostering social ties as the student interact, share challenges and identify possible solutions to the challenges, their social ties become stronger. It also keeps learners away from negative behaviors, fosters personal growth, improves communication skills and strengthens interrelationships with other learners, teachers and community members and ultimately improves learner retention (Markovic, Trifunovic, & Sekeljic, 2016; Brizuela, 2017; Furman et al., 2019). Another proposal on the clubs was that they should be utilising modes of communication such as drama, songs and poems to promote the rights of adolescent boys and girls and to address the issue of stigmatization and discrimination of the adolescent mothers when they re-enrol in schools. Use of drama, songs and poems in the learner clubs helps to promote the rights of adolescent boys and girls and also helps to address the issue of stigmatization and discrimination of the adolescent mothers when they re-enrol in schools (Msukwa and Amulike, 2013). In addition, guidelines should be put in place to be used for the initiative so that all the members should adhere to for the sake of the future progress.

4.6.3 Well established schedule for regular trainings.

The need for regular trainings for members of Mother Groups as a way of empowering them came out in several interviews from the various categories. This resonates well with section 4.5.3 where the paper highlighted that lack of trainings to capacitate the Mother Groups came as the number three most pressing weakness for the groups. One Teacher stated as follows

“...we cannot underrate the importance of these structures. They assist us a lot. But sometimes the challenge I personally have is they don’t seem to know clearly what their roles are. And the little knowledge they gain

through learning from their peers doesn't get transferred effectively to new members when the groups are beefed with additional individuals. So you have a case where a poorly capacitated member becomes trainer for a new members. This I think sometimes contributes to ineffectiveness of the groups in fulfilling their roles. There is need for deliberate efforts to train the members. Ensure there is knowledge sharing amongst them. And most importantly these trainings should not just be a once off", (Teacher 29th June, 2023).

Timely capacity building for Mother Groups for them to be conversant with the real issues that encumber girls' education is critical. A mother group member shared her experience as follows

"I became a member of Mother Group some 2 years ago. At first I was so happy that I would be something that would uplift my community. I didn't know where to start when I started carrying out my duties as a member of the Mother Group. Nobody taught me what I would be doing. I would attend meetings just as spectator. It became embarrassing. Our friends, in committees like ours get trained. What's wrong with us? (Respondent from a Mother Group 12th June, 2023).

Training could also take the form of exchange visits between Mother Groups so that they share ideas on what to do when dealing with the issues that lead to low retention rate amongst girls in school. It was argued that the idea behind is to share ideas, which other Mother Groups normally do. Through visitations there is a possibility of learning some of innovations that other Mother Groups are doing. Most of Mother Group members commented that *"when we share ideas, we empower our Mother Groups, empower our needy children, keep all children in school, this in the long run prepares them for their future lives as well as improving literacy and education standards in the country"*.

This transpired during the FGDs at Mother Group 003, most of the participants commented that;

“It is important to share ideas because as Mother Group 003 alone, we cannot know everything but if we learn from what they do in other districts or zones, we can also improve our skills here. I would like to urge other Mother Groups to do that and share ideas in order to improve their operations for the sake of the of girl child”, (Mother Group 003, 21st June, 2023).

For Mother Groups to be effective capacity building trainings are important. And from the sentiments of the Mother Group member and many others, lack of knowledge about their roles can demotivate them and lead to collapse of Mother Group structure. Dabas & Singh (2021) in their study of other school committees such as SMCs found that where such committees are given need based capacity building trainings they contribute effectively to school governance and development. Similar studies have shown that capacity building in various areas including advocacy, leadership, and fundraising is important as it helps promote education, fosters social accountability, gender responsiveness, enhances sustainable developments and improves overall educational outcomes within the school community through effective parent-teacher partnerships (Imran, 2015; Murry 2018; Jara, 2014; Eade, 1997). Training and capacity building is critical for effective functionality of Mother Groups. In addition, the government should have some incentives for the Mother Group members. Incentives will motivate their zeal, commitment and curiosity towards girls’ education.

4.6.4 Intensive campaigns should be put in place.

Additionally, it was also suggested that there should be campaigns to sensitize the community about the need of holding hands together in curbing the factors that necessitate the dire situation of the girls’ education.

"I believe intensive campaigns should be put in place to sensitize the community about the need for collective action in addressing the challenges affecting girls' education."

Similarly another participant commented as follows

"Absolutely, as they say, 'it takes a village to raise a child.' We need combined efforts from all stakeholders."

A teacher also shared similar sentiments

"Parents and guardians must understand the importance of education. We shouldn't let girls' appearances dictate their futures. Together, we can support them in returning to school."

This is in agreement with Msukwa and Amulike (2013), observations that Mother Groups aggressive campaigns have motivated some of the girls who dropped out of school because of early pregnancies or early marriages to go back to school.

Empowering communities to spearhead systemic transformations stands as the linchpin for crafting impactful, contextually apt, and enduring resolutions for the advancement of adolescent girls' education. Research conducted by Nyirongo and Chulu (2021), underscores that the pivotal aspect in the efficacy of social interventions targeting girls' education lies in fostering genuine ownership and agency among community members to lead the transformative journey. It asserts that interventions must be strategically oriented towards dismantling the underlying systemic barriers perpetuating the issues at hand. Moreover, the study accentuates that when communities undertake the task of comprehensively mapping the intricate web of systems enveloping adolescent girls, they are better equipped to devise and implement interventions with maximum efficacy.

4.6.5 Engaging girls with more dialogues.

There should be some activities which will be used in order to motivate learners to stick to their studies. There is need for more dialogues between the Mother Group and girls. During interviews most of respondents commented that girls should be empowered with life skills education and the importance of education as part of activities that will engage more girls. This was also echoed by one of the learners who argued for the need of life skills education. She remembered what her previous school in Kasungu taught them *"We learn about the dangers of teenage pregnancy, early child marriage and early sexual debut"*. In the light of this view, the study noted that through life skills education to be

provided by mothers' groups, learners will learn not to stigmatize girls who have re-admitted after their child bearing and other related issues.

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings and discussion results on Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in schools. The study findings revealed that Mother Group have right perceptions towards girls' education. In addition, it has also found that Mother Groups use a number of mechanisms to curb cross cutting issues that contribute low retention amongst girls in schools. Besides, it has also revealed that the mechanisms help foster retention rate, reduce school dropout rate as well as repetition rate amongst girls in primary schools. The study also identified establishment of organizational structures, well established schedule for regular trainings, learning from the success stories of other Mother Groups and friendlier school environments for adolescent girls' education as some of the strategies that can be used to keep hold of girls in schools. The discussion of results was guided by motherism theory which advocates that mothers are the best key players in raising up a girl child because of their motherly heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Chapter overview

Chapter five summarizes the study findings and provides conclusions and recommendations on the Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in schools. It has highlighted the recommendations that the research earthed out from the teachers, students and Mother Groups who participated in the research. Finally, the recommendations are provided for action and further research.

5.2 Chapter Summary

Chapter five summarizes the study findings and provides conclusions and implications if the study findings. The study made an investigation on the Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in schools. The main objective of the study was to assess Mother Groups' interventions in the retention of girls in primary schools at Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi District. The research study generated the results using the five specific objectives namely; to find out the perceptions of girls, boys, teachers and head teachers towards Mother Groups' involvement in the retention of girls in schools at Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi District, to assess Mother Group perceptions towards girls' education at Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi District, to investigate the mechanisms which have been put in place by the Mother Groups and school staff as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute low retention amongst girls in schools., to assess the impact of the mechanisms which have been put in place by Mother Groups as a way of dealing with the cross-cutting issues that contribute low retention amongst girls in primary schools and to explore possible strategies that can be used either to keep hold of girls in schools or to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate and high school dropout rate amongst girls in schools. The researcher used a mixed method as such questionnaires, interview guide, focus group discussions and in-depth interview were the research instruments in the process of data collection.

Briefly, the following were some of the findings based on the first specific objective of the study; the knowledge taught during traditional initiation ceremonies is somehow relevant to some of the secondary school subjects such as practical skills, character formation, respect aspects, cooperation, hospitality, politeness, faithfulness and truthfulness. These concepts have bearings on the formal education subjects like Life Skills, Biology, Social Studies and Expressive Arts in primary school. Among others, practical skills also empower initiates financially; the teachings enable the initiates to understanding issues of human reproduction, interpersonal relationship skills, personal hygiene and moral values, and also initiates understanding their ancestors' life style.

The study found that the community, school administration, learners and other school stakeholders all have right perceptions towards Mother Group initiative. Their positive attitude was reflected through actions, moral, psychosocial and physical support towards girls, hence girls' education both at home and school environments becoming friendly. Secondly, the study found that Mother Groups have a right perceptions towards girls' education. Their commitment for girls' retention in primary school revealed their affection towards girls' education. Furthermore the study found that Mother Groups have a number of mechanisms which are used to rectify or mitigate critical issues that encumber girls' education. These are inspirational talks, girls-retreat sessions, community sensitization and one-on-one counselling sessions. It has been noted that guidance and counselling services play a big role in sorting out psychosocial challenges of the teenage mothers/girls at school.

The study uncovered varied responses regarding the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by Mother Groups to address challenges in girls' education. While interventions have positively impacted school dropout rates by narrowing the gap and boosting retention rates, challenges persist that demand immediate attention from relevant authorities. These include deficiencies in leadership, unclear objectives and goals, inadequate training and capacity-building support, insufficient financial resources, and a lack of government mentorship. Despite the progress made, these hurdles

underscore the need for comprehensive and sustained efforts to ensure the continued success of Mother Group initiatives in promoting girls' education and retention.

Another finding from the study is that there are a number of strategies that can be used to mitigate the persisting factors which lead to low retention rate. These are life skills training programmes, establishment of organizational structures, well established schedule for regular trainings, intensive campaigns should be put in place, engaging girls with more dialogues, learning from the success stories of other Mother Groups, enhancing friendlier school environments for adolescent girls' education.

5.3 Conclusion

In summary, the study highlights the positive impact of the Mother Group initiative on girls' education. This impact is evidenced by a reduction in school dropout rates, an increase in retention rates, and an improvement in attitudes towards girls' education. Moreover, the initiative has provided crucial moral, physical, and psychological support to teenage mothers within school settings. However, despite these achievements, certain factors continue to impede the effectiveness of Mother Group operations in schools.

Broadly, the Mother Group initiative employs various mechanisms, including inspirational talks, girls' retreat sessions, community sensitization efforts, and one-on-one counselling sessions. Notably, the provision of guidance and counselling services plays an important role in addressing the psychosocial challenges faced by teenage mothers/girls in school. Additionally, the study identifies several strategies aimed at mitigating persistent factors contributing to low retention rates. These strategies encompass the implementation of life skills training programs, the establishment of robust organizational structures, the implementation of well-defined schedules for regular training sessions, the execution of intensive awareness campaigns, the facilitation of increased dialogue with girls, drawing insights from successful initiatives of other Mother Groups, and fostering friendlier school environments conducive to adolescent girls' education.

5.4 Implications

Below are the significant implications derived from the study's findings and conclusions, shedding light on the broader impact and relevance of the research:

1. **Regular Training Sessions:** The study underscores the importance of implementing a well-structured schedule for regular training sessions within Mother Groups. These sessions are not only vital for enhancing organizational productivity and performance but also for equipping members with the necessary knowledge and skills to excel in their roles. By prioritizing training initiatives, Mother Groups can foster a culture of continuous learning, leading to increased member performance, alignment with organizational goals, and enhanced innovation in the workplace.
2. **Financial Support and Organization:** The findings emphasize the critical need for robust organizational support and funding mechanisms for Mother Groups. Government intervention and mobilization of additional stakeholders are essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the initiative. Securing adequate financial resources is imperative for empowering girls and nurturing their leadership potential, thereby advancing the cause of girls' education and empowerment.
3. **Merit-Based Leadership Selection:** Effective leadership within Mother Groups is crucial for driving meaningful change. The study recommends adopting a merit-based approach in selecting leaders, ensuring that individuals possess the requisite skills and qualities to lead effectively. By prioritizing merit in leadership appointments, the government can maximize the impact and effectiveness of the initiative, ultimately benefiting the community and advancing the objectives of the Mother Group initiative.
4. **Engaging Girls through Dialogue:** Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by girls, the study advocates for fostering dialogue and advocacy to actively engage girls and their communities in the Mother Group initiative. By partnering with local authorities and coordinating concerted actions, Mother Groups can address

entrenched cultural and social barriers, fostering a culture of inclusivity and empowerment. Prioritizing dialogical engagement enables transformative change, ultimately promoting girls' education and societal progress.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

The following were suggested as further areas of study to the related topic.

1. Since this study was restricted to the sampled four primary schools only, there is a need to conduct a research study which will involve many schools across the country in order to get more research findings.
2. An investigation on the influence of Mother Group initiative on learning of girls in schools.
3. An investigation on how the Ministry of Education can institutionalize the Mother Group initiative.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for the Mother Group

My name is Jessie Kapombe and I am a student at University of Malawi (UNIMA). I am doing a study on “an assessment of Mother Groups’ involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools”. The purpose of this questionnaire is to request you to provide relevant responses required for this research study. The information obtained from you is solely for the purpose of this research and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Part 1 Personal Details

1. Name of the Mother Group:

2. Age

15 – 20		21 – 25		26 – 30		31 - 35		36 – 40		41 and above	
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3. Gender

F	
---	--

4. Marital status ☐ Married ☐ Single ☐ Divorced ☐ Widower ☐ Widow ☐ Separated

5. Education level:

- ☐ Lower than primary school
- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ Junior Secondary school
- ☐ Senior Secondary school
- ☐ Bachelor’s degree
- ☐ ≥ Master degree

Part 2
Questions

Please Tick either AGREED or NOT AGREED in the box provided
The Mother Groups use a variety of methods.

STATEMENT	Agreed	Not agreed
They explain the importance of education to girls		
Serve as role models to girls,		
They counsel girls on how to resist pressures to drop out.		
Arrange referrals for reproductive health services.		
Inculcate girls on how to overcome real life situations or challenges		
The mothers show girls how to care for themselves, including how to make sanitary pads out of scraps of cloth which can be washed and re-used.		

Please Tick where you feel it is appropriate to you in the box provided
The importance of Mother Groups for a girl-child in schools and challenges for girls

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
Enhancing high retention rate amongst the girls					
Helping to reduce high school dropout rate amongst the girls in school					
Promote the spirit of assertiveness and perseverance amongst the girls in school					
Since they began their guidance and counselling, girls in schools now cope up with their challenges hence they are able to complete their studies					
The Mother Groups help many girls to stay in school or to return if they have left					
Some girls face pressure from their own parents to quit school					
Most parents prefer boys' education to girls' education.					

END OF THE QUESTIONS - Thanks for your assistance.

Appendix 2: FGDs for the Mother Group

My name is Jessie Kapombe, student from the University of Malawi and currently I am doing my research study. I am the one who will be facilitating this group discussion so feel free. We will be discussing on the research study entitled, “an assessment of Mother Groups’ involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools”. I am much interested in finding out from you what you know about the girls’ education especially on how the Mother Groups initiative is helping to mitigate the factors that contribute to school dropout amongst the girls and also on how the Mother Group is doing in order to raise the bar of retention rate amongst the girls in primary schools. This information will be anonymized and will be treated as confidential. If at any point you do not want to continue participating in this discussion, you are free to leave the group and we will no longer be asking you any more questions. The information discussed today will help us to understand what can be done to improve girls’ education in order to educate more girls.

Recording: Concurrently, I would like to record this discussion and taking down the notes so that I might not miss any important information. All notes and the recording will be kept safely and securely. Is everyone okay with recording this conversation? (Confirm that all participants consent)

In addition, I also ask that you please take turns while speaking and do not interrupt anyone. We are interested in what all of you have to say, so please be respectful of each other’s opinions. This discussion will last about 45 minutes. Before we begin, does anyone have any questions?

Opening questions:

1. Name of the Community: -----
2. Name of the school : -----
3. District : -----
4. Division: -----

QUESTIONS PART 1: Historical Background of Mother Groups

1. What does Mother Group initiative mean to you?
2. How did the Mother Groups start in Malawi?
3. How did you first get involved in the Mother Group initiative?
4. Were you involved in the human-centred design process at the beginning of the Mother Group initiative? **[If yes]**, share with me your own experience, how does the initiative has helped to shape your understanding of the issues affecting girls' education in your community

Questions PART 11: Perceptions towards Mother Groups

5. How does the community feel about the Mother Group initiative?
6. How do the school pupils, both girls and boys feel about the Mother Group initiative?
7. How does the school administration feel about the Mother Group initiative?
8. Why is it necessary to have Mother Groups in your schools?
9. What are your wishes for the girls in your community?

Key questions: Aims of Mother Groups

10. What are the norms or rules of Mother Groups that have been put in place to support girls' education?
11. What are the objectives, goals and aims of Mother Groups in your community as regards to girls' education?
12. In your opinion, do you think that these objectives, goals and strategies that the Mother Groups have put in place are helping to reduce high school dropout and enhancing the retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
13. If it is yes, would you please outline any success stories you have had because of the Mother Groups' initiative?
14. In your opinion, what are some of the ways that can be put in place {as supplementary} in order to improve girls' education especially on retention?
15. Could you tell me about the key issues that your community faced in terms of girls' education which led to the establishment of Mother Group initiative?
16. Reflecting more broadly on your work in this initiative with the primary school

- pupils, what would you say have been your key achievements? [What are you doing well, in your opinion? What are your challenges? What might have been some gaps or areas needing improvement, in terms of your work in this initiative with the MoEST, school administration, primary school girls and their parents?]
17. Do you interact with or receive mentorship or support from the government or their contracted personnel such as school staff, DEM? [**If yes**, can you describe to me the kind of capacity support that you have ever received as a Mother Group from the government over the years?]
 18. Overall, what has worked well? What have been the successes? What have been the challenges? What could be improved? [**Probe** for specific examples to be provided]
 19. What progress do you think your involvement in this initiative has made in terms of girls' education outcomes such as; high retention rate and reducing school dropout rate amongst the girls?
 20. Have you noticed any changes in performance and participation of your girl child in this initiative since it started? [**If there is any**, what were the reasons behind those changes?]
 21. What are your wishes for your girls in your community?

Closing questions.

22. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the Mother Group, your involvement, and the outcomes?

End of discussions

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for pupils

My name is Jessie Kapombe and I am a student at University of Malawi (UNIMA). I am doing a study on “an assessment of Mother Groups’ involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools”. The purpose of this questionnaire is to request you to provide relevant responses required for this research study. The information obtained from you is solely for the purpose of this research and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Part 1

Personal Details

1. SCHOOL CODE..... (Assigned specifically for the study)

2. Age

08 – 10		11 – 13		14 & above	
---------	--	---------	--	------------	--

3. Gender

Girl	
Boy	

4. Class

STD 7	
STD 8	

Part 2

Questions

Please Tick either AGREED or NOT AGREED in the box provided
The Mother Groups use a variety of methods.

STATEMENT	Agreed	Not agreed
They explain the importance of education to girls		
Serve as role models to girls,		
They counsel girls on how to resist pressures to drop out.		
Arrange referrals for reproductive health services.		
Inculcate girls on how to overcome real life situations or challenges		
The mothers show girls how to care for themselves		

Please Tick where you feel it is appropriate to you in the box provided

The importance of Mother Groups for a girl-child in schools and challenges for girls

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
Statements					
Enhancing high retention rate amongst the girls					
Helping to reduce high school dropout rate amongst the girls in school					
Promote the spirit of assertiveness and perseverance amongst the girls in school					
Since they began their guidance and counselling, girls in schools now cope up with their challenges hence they are able to complete their studies					
The Mother Groups help many girls to stay in school or to return if they have left					
Some girls face pressure from their own parents to quit school					
Most parents prefer boys' education to girls' education.					
Mother Groups are improving school attendance					
The Mother Groups work as volunteers; it is important to support them with training					

END OF THE QUESTIONS - Thanks for your assistance.

Appendix 4: FGD guide for pupils

My name is Jessie Kapombe and I am a student at University of Malawi (UNIMA). I am doing a study on “an assessment of Mother Groups’ involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools”. I am informed that in your school there is a certain group known as Mother Group whose main responsibility is to help girls to complete their education and I would like to know from you how the group handles the issues that encumber girls’ education. I assure you that your real name will not be used throughout the study and if in any case I have to mention your name, I will seek permission from you.

1. School code-----
2. District : -----
3. Division: -----

Participants:

1. Participant code -----Gender: -----Age-----Class----
2. Participant code -----Gender: -----Age-----Class----
3. Participant code -----Gender: -----Age-----Class----
4. Participant code -----Gender: -----Age-----Class----
5. Participant code -----Gender: -----Age-----Class----
6. Participant code -----Gender: -----Age-----Class----
7. Participant code -----Gender -----Age-----Class----
8. Participant code -----Gender -----Age -----Class----
9. Participant code -----Gender -----Age -----Class----
10. Participant code -----Gender -----Age -----Class---

Questions

1. What does Mother Group initiative mean to you?
2. How do you feel about the Mother Group initiative?
3. In your opinion, do you think that Mother Group is very necessary in your school? {If yes, in what ways?
4. Could you tell me about the key issues that your community faced in terms of girls' education outcomes which led to the establishment of Mother Group?
5. What were the interventions carried out in response to these issues? Why were these strategies chosen? Did things change over time?

6. Overall, what progress do you think the Mother Group initiative have made in terms of girls' education outcomes such as retention rate and school dropout rate amongst the girls?
7. If we are to compare between girls and boys, who are at risk when it comes to school high dropout rate? Do you think that the Mother Group initiative is the appropriate remedy for mitigating the factors that contribute to school high dropout rate?
8. What are the strategies that have been put in place by the Mother Group;
 - I. As a way of dealing with the cross cutting issues that contribute to low retention rate amongst girls in your school?
 - II. As a way of promoting survival/completion rate?
 - III. As a way of reducing repetition rate amongst the girls in schools
9. How relevant are these strategies with the cross cutting issues that contribute to low retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
10. What could be other suggested strategies that can be put in place to be used either to keep hold of girls in schools or to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate amongst girl pupils in your schools?

Closing questions.

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the Mother Group involvement on retention amongst the girls in your school or any other observation?

Thank You Very Much!

Appendix 5: An interview guide for pupils

My name is Jessie Kapombe and I am a student at University of Malawi (UNIMA). I am doing a study on “an assessment of Mother Groups’ involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools”. I am informed that in your school there is a certain group known as Mother Group whose main responsibility is to help girls to complete their education and I would like to know from you how the group handles the issues that encumber girls’ education. I assure you that your real name will not be used throughout the study and if in any case I have to mention your name, I will seek permission from you.

Interviewee code -----Gender: -----

1. School code : -----
2. District : -----
3. Division: -----

Questions

1. How old are you?
2. In which class are you?
3. What does Mother Group initiative mean to you?
4. How do you feel about the Mother Group initiative?
5. How do your fellow pupils, both girls and boys feel about the Mother Group initiative?
6. In your opinion, do you think that Mother Group is very necessary in your school? {If yes, in what ways?
7. Could you tell me about the key issues that your community faced in terms of girls' education outcomes which led to the establishment of Mother Group?
8. What were the interventions carried out in response to these issues? Why were these strategies chosen? Did things change over time?
9. Overall, what progress do you think the Mother Group initiative have made in terms of girls' education outcomes such as; high retention rate and reducing school dropout rate amongst the girls?

10. What are the strategies that have been put in place by the Mother Group as a way of dealing with the cross cutting issues that contribute low retention rate amongst girls in your school?
11. How relevant are these strategies with the cross cutting issues that contribute to low retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
12. What could be other suggested strategies that can be put in place to be used either to keep hold of girls in schools or to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate amongst girl pupils in your schools?

Closing questions.

13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the Mother Group involvement on retention amongst the girls in your school or any other observation?

End of questions

Thank You Very Much!

Appendix 6: Interview guide for school dropouts

Participant codeGender.....

Year when dropped from school/...../.....

Reason for dropping from school

Topic: An assessment of Mother Groups' involvement on retention rate of girls in primary
Schools.

1. Have you ever heard about the Mother Groups?
2. If it is yes, who are they? How have they started?
3. In your own understanding, do you think that the Mother Groups are helpful in the following areas
 - I. Mitigating the high school dropout rate amongst the girls?
 - II. Promoting survival/completion/retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
 - III. Reducing the repetition rate amongst the girls in schools?
4. If your answer is yes, would you please explain any helpful endeavors that the Mother Groups are doing in assisting to enhance the high retention rate of girls in school?
5. In your own personal observation, would you please to share with me your experience when you felt truly supported by the Mother Groups?
6. What are the mechanisms which have been put in place by the Mother Groups and school staff as a way of dealing with the cross cutting issues that contribute low retention rate amongst girls in schools?
7. How effective are the mechanisms which have been put in place by Mother Groups as a way of dealing with the cross cutting issues that contribute to low retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
8. In your observation, do you think that there is need to add other rules and strategies for the group to achieve its mandate successfully?
9. What could be the suggested strategies that can be put in place to be used to keep hold of girls in schools?

Thank You Very Much!

Appendix 7: An interview guide for teachers

My name is Jessie Kapombe and I am a student at University of Malawi (UNIMA). I am doing a study on “an assessment of Mother Groups’ involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools”. I am informed that in your school there is a certain group known as Mother Group whose main responsibility is to help girls to complete their education and I would like to know from you how this group handles the issues that encumber girls’ education. I assure you that your real name will not be used throughout the study and if in any case I have to mention your name, I will seek permission from you.

Recording: Concurrently, I would like to record this discussion and taking down the notes so that I might not miss any important information. All notes and the recording will be kept safely and securely. Is everyone okay with recording this conversation? (Confirm that all participants consent).

This discussion will last about 30 minutes. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Interviewee code -----Gender: -----

Questions

1. School code : -----
2. District : -----
3. Division: -----
4. How old are you?
5. In which class are you teaching?
6. I would also like to know your level of education, tell me your education background
7. What does Mother Group initiative mean to you?
8. How do you feel about the Mother Group initiative? How are mothers groups organized?
9. How does your school administration feel about the Mother Group initiative?

10. In your opinion, do you think that Mother Group is the best panacea for dire situation of girls' education in your school and Malawi as a whole? {If yes, would you please justify your answer with relevant examples}?
11. Could you tell me about the key issues that your school faced in terms of girls' education outcomes which led to the establishment of Mother Group?
12. Overall, what progress do you think the Mother Group initiative have made in terms of girls' education outcomes such as reducing school dropout rate amongst the girls?
13. What are the strategies that have been put in place by the Mother Group;
 - I. As a way of dealing with the cross cutting issues that contribute low retention rate amongst girls in your school?
 - II. As a way of reducing repetition rate?
 - III. As a way of promoting survival/completion rate?
14. How relevant are these strategies with the cross cutting issues that contribute to low retention rate amongst the girls in schools?
15. What could be other suggested strategies that can be put in place to be used either to keep hold of girls in schools or to mitigate factors which lead to low retention rate amongst girl pupils in your schools?
16. What might have been some gaps or areas needing improvement, in terms of Mother Group involvement on retention of girls in your school?
17. Let's discuss parents' perceptions towards their daughters in comparison with boys, what are their perspectives in terms of girl-child education vs boy-child education? Do you see any favoritism or stereotype? How did the Mother Group handle or deal with these issues? (parents perceptions towards their daughters in comparison with boys)

Closing questions.

18. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the Mother Group involvement on retention amongst the girls in your school or any other observation?

Thank You Very Much!

Appendix 8: Informed consent form

Title of the Proposal: An assessment of Mother Groups' involvement on retention rate of girls in Primary Schools

Principal Investigator: Jessie Kapombe {med-ppl-21-19}

Preamble

We invite you all to take part in a research study entitled "An assessment of Mother Groups' involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools at Bumba and to be specific the following primary schools have been chosen as research sites; Phalasito, Mbiriwizi, Chozoli and NKhwangu respectively. The main idea of this study is to assess Mother Groups' involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools since it has been researched out that due to a myriad challenges of different kinds girls' education has been at risk hence registered high dropout rate than boys. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. As such, if you decide to participate you must sign this form to show that you want to take part.

Research purpose and procedures:

The purpose of this study is to assess the Mother Groups' involvement on retention rate of girls in primary schools. You are being offered the opportunity to take part in this research study because of the following reasons;

- (a) For the Mother Group, you are the major player whose main duty is to mitigate the factors that immensely contribute to low retention rate, high school dropout rate and high repetition rate amongst the girls.
- (b) Teachers, pupils and school dropout, you are the victims in one way or the other.

Procedures and time duration.

There will be four categories and these are teachers, pupils, Mother Group and school dropouts respectively. Besides, on each category (except the school dropout) there will be also three categories and these are; questionnaire respondents, interface interviewees and focus group discussion respondents respectively). All activities have been given specific times i.e. FGDs will run approximately 45 minutes, personal interviews will run for about 30 minutes etc. Concurrently, during the interviews the investigator will be recording the

discussions and taking down the notes so that any important information might not be missed.

NB: All forms of consent/interview guide sheets have their own descriptions on procedures and time duration, rights of the participants etc.

Risks and discomforts of the research study:

We want to assure you all that there are no known risks associated with the research study since there are no chemicals to be used. However, while on the study, you might be at risk either with potential anxiety related to the sensitive nature of the questions to be asked especially for the school dropout participants or contracting Covid-19 pandemic/cholera epidemic since our country is faced with these challenges (pandemic and epidemic).

Hence, all preventive measures have been put in place in order to prevent you from not contracting Covid-19 pandemic or cholera epidemic. We have brought you enough bottles of sanitizer, enough face masks, enough water and tablets of soap for you to use. Hence, every participant will wear mask, observe a social distance of 1.5 meters and wash hands regularly either with soap/sanitizer.

Potential benefit of the research study:

Possible benefits for the participants and other education stakeholders.

The information to be discussed will help the school stakeholders to understand what can be further done to improve girls' education in order to educate more girls in Malawi. Empirical findings will also help to update how effective are the Mother Group initiative as regard to the current internal efficiency of girls' education in Malawi. Finally, the findings will help the government of Malawi to perceive how far the girls' education has gone.

Provisions for confidentiality:

We will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. As such, whatever you are going to share in this study will be anonymized and will be

treated as confidential. It should be overemphasized that the information obtained from you is solely for the purpose of this research and will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Your research records that are reviewed, stored, and analyzed will be kept in a secured area such as drop box, flash and laptop. And the ideal behind of recording your voice is not to miss any important information but once the findings are transcribed, interpreted and analyzed the records will be definitely destroyed. We also assure you that your real name will not be used throughout the study and if in any case we have to mention your name, we will seek permission from you.

Research related injury:

In the event of injury resulting from this research, we will cover costs of research-related injuries. In other words, if complications or injuries occur that are the result of a procedure required for this study, we (investigator) will reimburse the standard charges for the treatment of these complications or injuries, provided these charges have not been reimbursed by your non-governmental medical insurance or other third party. The compensation described in this section will be the only form of compensation provided to you for complications or injuries related to this study.

Voluntariness in participation and the right to discontinue participation without penalty.

In addition, we want also to say it in clear terms that, if at any point you do not want to continue participating in this discussion, you are free to leave the group (FGDs), you are free to leave the interview (individual) and we will no longer be asking you any more questions. If you choose to take part, and you have also the right to stop at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Contacts for additional information:

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or you have concerns or general questions about the research, contact the investigator on +265 (0) 993-407-054 or email at jessiekapombe33@gmail.com or you can also contact the chairperson of the

research and ethics committee (UNIMAREC): Prof Alister Munthali, P.O. Box 280,
Zomba. +265 888 822 044.

I. Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES

NO

II. Do you understand that you can STOP being in the study at any time?

YES

NO

Signature of the participant

Date

Appendix 9: Assent form for children under 18 years

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

An Assessment of Mother Groups' Involvement on Retention Rate of Girls in Primary Schools. A Case of Chozoli Cluster, Bumba Zone in Rumphi, Malawi.

RESEARCHERS' NAME: Jessie Kapombe

RESEARCHER'S CONTACT NUMBER: +265 (0) 993-407-054

A brief understanding of word RESEARCH

Research is something we do find **NEW KNOWLEDGE** about the way things (and people) work. We use research studies to help us find out more about children and teenagers and the things that affect their lives, their schools, their families and their health. We do this to try and make the world a better place to live.

The current research study is all about:

Investigating on how the Mother Group have managed to fight against the factors that contribute many girls to drop off from their schools.

The reason why you have been invited to take part in this research study

We want to assess whether pupils in particular girls like you, you are indeed helped by the Mother Groups to complete your education despite many challenges you are facing.

The one who is doing the research

My name is Jessie Kapombe and I am a student at University of Malawi and I am a research study as a requirement for one to complete a master's degree program.

Your expectation on this this study

You are expect to answer me the questions related to the involvement of Mother Group especially on how are they helping girls to work hard at school. Hence, I will be writing down notes on whatever you are going to share with me and it will take us about 30 minutes plus.

In case, something bad happened to you

If anything threaten you in the course of our conversations, please let me know so that I can assist you accordingly.

Something good to happen to me

This study will among others help the education sector to seriously look into the issues that are still encumber girls' education despite the efforts of Mother Group initiative.

The issue of confidentiality.

Your participation in this study is secured in the sense that the information obtained from you is solely for the purpose of this research and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

In case, you have experienced any problem because of this study

Here are my contacts; in case, you have any questions or you have experienced some challenges you can reach me at jessiekapombe33@gmail.com or you can call me on 0993-407-054 or you can also contact the chair of the research and ethics committee (UNIMAREC): Prof Alister Munthali, P.O. Box 280, Zomba on 888 822 044

Your rights in this study

You are free not to take part in this study even if your parents might have agreed to your participation. In addition, if at any point you do not want to continue participating in this discussion, you are free to leave the group and we will no longer be asking you any more questions.

I. Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES

NO

II. Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES

NO

III. Do you understand that you can STOP being in the study at any time?

YES

NO

Signature of Child

____/____/____
Date