

**EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC PERIOD: CASE OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
ZOMBA URBAN**

M.Ed. (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY) THESIS

JIREH MANDA

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

JULY, 2024



**EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC PERIOD: CASE OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
ZOMBA URBAN**

M.Ed. (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY) THESIS

By

JIREH MANDA

B.Ed. (Social Studies) –University of Malawi

Submitted to the School of Education, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters of Education (Educational Psychology)

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

JULY 2024

DECLARATION

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

JIREH MANDA

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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

Signature:_____Date:_____

Symon Chiziwa, PhD (Senior Lecturer)

Supervisor

DEDICATION

This Document is dedicated with deepest appreciation and respect to my family: Blackwell, Phelire, Lusungu and Tsidkenu. Grateful for their tireless efforts and encouragement throughout my study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to all the people who helped me in different and valuable ways in the successful completion of my thesis. My supervisor, Dr. Symon Chiziwa, for his skilled guidance, tireless effort and motivation throughout the writing of this thesis. In addition, I gratefully acknowledge the Education Foundations Department at the University of Malawi, for their help throughout the time of my study. Thirdly, I gratefully acknowledge all the assistance given to me by the head teachers and teachers from the schools I visited during my study. Finally, I would like to thank my family for enduring the hardships through my busy schedule. To all my friends, too numerous to mention, thank you for your moral and financial support.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences of secondary school students in the Zomba District during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilized interviews, focus group discussions, and desk research especially information taken from the internet as data collection methods. The research was conducted in Zomba Urban, encompassing three secondary schools, comprising a day school and two boarding schools, with open-ended questions facilitating comprehensive responses. The researcher managed to conduct nine interviews and three focus group discussions consisting of ten students each, from the three respective secondary schools. The key findings underscore the pervasive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of students' lives, notably affecting their mental health. The key findings encompass that, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the social aspect and the mental health of the participants as well as the delivery of instruction in the respective schools. Furthermore, the disruption of the learning process ensued, necessitating the implementation of measures to ensure educational continuity. Despite efforts by teachers and head teachers to provide counselling on Covid-19-related issues, the study revealed suboptimal outcomes, as many students absorbed negative beliefs from their parents. Notably, the absence of online learning in schools was attributed to both the prevailing national circumstances and the country's socio-economic challenges. Limited access to the internet, exacerbated by the absence of smartphones among students, precluded effective online learning. The present educational sector faced a crisis like COVID-19 with little or no knowledge at all, therefore the study seeks to impart knowledge to the future generations on the measures to follow and policies to put in place when any crisis like COVID-19 arises. The study emphasizes the need for substantial investment from the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders during pandemics like COVID-19 to address challenges faced by schools. Recommendations include strategic initiatives to enhance technological access for students and comprehensive support systems to mitigate the adverse effects on learning and well-being.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Chapter Overview	1
1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic: Global-level	1
1.2.1 COVID-19 pandemic: National level	4
1.2.2 Brief description of its emergence and Global response/WHO	5
1.2.3 COVID-19 pandemic: National Response	6
1.2.4 Closure of schools	8
1.2.5 COVID-19 Statistics.....	10
1.2.6 Mitigation	10
1.2.7 Ministry of Education’s response measures and opening of school.....	12
1.2.8 National studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools , and learners in particular.....	12
1.3 Statement of the problem	14
1.4 Purpose of the study	15
1.5 Research Questions	15
1.5.1 Main Research Questions	16
1.5.2 Specific Research Questions	16

1.6 Significance of the study	16
1.7 Chapter Summary.....	17
CHAPTER TWO	18
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
2.1 Chapter overview	18
2.2 Social aspects of the students' lives affected by COVID-19 pandemic.....	18
2.3 The effect of COVID 19 pandemic on the delivery of instruction in schools ...	19
2.4 The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of students in schools	21
2.5 How schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID 19 pandemic	23
2.7 Theoretical Framework	25
2.8 Chapter Summary.....	30
CHAPTER THREE	31
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	31
3.1 Chapter Overview	31
3.3 Research Paradigm.....	32
3.4 Research Design.....	33
3.5 Study Sites / Location	34
3.6 Study Participants.....	34
3.7 Study Period	34
3.8 Sampling Methods.....	34
3.9 Sample Size	35
3.10 Data Collection Tools	36
3.10.1 Data Management Methods.....	37
3.10.2 Data Analysis.....	37
3.11 Foreseeable and unforeseeable adverse events	38
3.12 Ethical considerations	38

3.13 Chapter Summary.....	39
CHAPTER 4	40
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	40
4.1 Chapter Overview	40
4.2 Respondents' Characteristics	40
4.3 Social aspects of the student's life the COVID-19 pandemic affected	41
4.3.1 Students' perceptions of the social impact of COVID 19	41
4.3.2 School Counselors' perceptions of the impact of COVID 19	45
4.4 The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of instruction in schools .46	
4.4.1 Teachers' perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the	
delivery.....	46
4.4.2 Head Teachers' perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the	
delivery of instruction in schools.....	48
4.5 The COVID 19 effects on mental health of students in schools	51
4.5.1 Head Teachers perceptions on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic	
on mental health of students in schools.....	52
4.5.2 Measures initiated to help the mental health of the students.....	53
4.6 Support rendered by schools in helping students to cope with the effects of the	
COVID-19 pandemic	55
4.6.1 How schools supported students cope with the effects of the COVID-19	
pandemic.....	56
4.6.2 Challenges faced by the schools in the course of supporting the students ..57	
4.6.3 Stakeholders that rendered help to the schools in supporting the students .59	
4.7 Chapter Summary.....	60
CHAPTER 5	61
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....	61
5.1 Chapter Overview	61
5.2 Summary of Key findings	61

5.3 Conclusions	62
5.3.1 Impact on Social Aspects of Students' Lives:.....	63
5.3.2 Impact on Mental Health:	63
5.3.3 Education Delivery Challenges and Responses:	64
5.4 Implications	64
5.5 Further Studies	65
REFERENCES	66
APPENDICES	75

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview guide with Head teachers	75
Appendix B: Interview guide with Teachers	78
Appendix C: Interview guide with School Counsellors	81
Appendix D: FGD Guide	84
Appendix E: Letter of Introduction.....	86
Appendix F: Informed Consent Form Research purpose and procedures:	87

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ICU	Intensive Care Unit
MOH	Ministry of Health
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
WHO	World Health Organization
SES	Socioeconomic Status

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This Chapter provides background information about the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Malawian society. It discusses the statement of the problem. It also outlines the purpose and specific objectives of the study and the significance of the study. The outline of the thesis is specified in the chapter.

1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic: Global-level

COVID-19 caused a global education emergency that was uncommon. In April 2020. The pandemic initiated mandate temporary school closures, leaving approximately 1.6 billion children out of school in more than 180 countries (UNICEF, 2021).

The unparalleled school closures during peacetime brought in extraordinary and unique challenge for parents, teachers and governments in their effort to ensure continuity of learning for children across countries. However, a dramatic difference was perceived in the ability of countries to respond to school closures. This situation became apparent in the second half of 2020, whereby 86% of children in primary schools were effectively out of school especially in countries with low human development –compared with 20% in countries with very high human development (UNDP 2020). In the process, the countries worked towards managing the continuity of learning while protecting the safety and well-being of learners, whilst on the other hand there is exclusion from formal learning opportunities (Singal, 2021)

The pandemic exposed many inadequacies and inequities in the education systems ranging from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning to the misalignment between resources and needs. The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 interrupted conventional schooling with nationwide school closures in most OECD and partner countries, lasting at least ten weeks. While the educational community made concerted efforts to maintain learning continuity during this period, children and students have had to rely more on their resources to continue learning remotely through the Internet, television or radio. Teachers also had to adapt to new pedagogical approaches and modes of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained (Ibid).

During the period of school closures, various activities were taking place which were crucial such as competitive exams and entrance tests of various universities, board examinations and semester examinations in universities, nursery school admissions as well as admission process in the universities.

School closures affected the structure of schooling and learning. Firstly, it affected the teaching and assessment methodologies. A few private schools adopted the online teaching methods (Tarkar, 2020). In those schools, students were taking classes online whilst on the other side low-income private and government schools had complete closure and were not having any access to e-Learning solutions which was a disruption to the learning of students (Ibid)

Although coronavirus indiscriminately spread and infected the population globally it discriminately impacted based and biased on gender, race and class, narrowly nationalistic citizenship and limited resources as well as infrastructure. The poor people, slum settlements, migrant workers, the unemployed, African Americans, international students, and the aged have borne more brunt of the pandemic. The above stated groups appear to be weaker in terms of capacity to fight and cope with the pandemic due to structural and socioeconomic discrimination that has occurred and that continues to occur to most of them daily(Ibid).

The diversity of pandemic responses is driven by the political leadership and legislative controls; and are molded by national differences that are present in the health systems, pandemic plans and available technology. Responses were likewise informed by prior experience with respiratory diseases and the availability of contact tracing apps leading to the limited and lagged data to inform policies as well as existing and forecasted shortages of ICU units. On the other hand, there are several insights into the decisions made by governments to the unfolding SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, and the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (Lee, 2020).

Some countries trailed a whole health system response by looking to research and development in order to improve the affordability of treatments and access to mental health services. In addition to that, they focused on increasing health resources and workers, optimising healthcare spaces and treatments, and providing additional funding for the health system. Countries also sought and implemented protection for older and vulnerable people. However, not all countries pursued these health system responses, and the specific papers (Ibid).

1.2.1 COVID-19 pandemic: National level

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi brought about numerous changes to the society at large. The first COVID-19 case was discovered in Malawi on 02 April 2020. The pandemic came during political wrangles by Malawian courts that ruled for a re-run of presidential elections in July 2020 due to anomalies detected in the May 2019 elections. The announcement of the first cases worsened the pre-existing mistrust that the Malawians had in the current ruling government. This led to the majority of people hampering the governments mitigation efforts, bringing a huge concern for Malawi in routing through the pandemic. The implementation of COVID-19 lockdown measures in Malawi faced a lot of resistance including a nationwide demonstration followed by a court injunction that stopped it because the plan was uncertain (Nyasulu, 2021).

Measures to control the number of COVID-19 cases among citizens were put in place, at least ranging from the individual level up to the national level, so that different activities in the country could continue to function. The Malawian government developed strategies and policies to prevent the pandemic's spread and ensure pupils' continued learning. The Covid-19 prevention measures included wearing masks, social distancing and hand washing. The policies on continued learning included measures to decongest classrooms and schools, remote learning and remedial learning. The measures being implemented were brought into a country with an already challenged education system characterised by inadequate resources and low learning outcomes.

The Educational System was not an exception since it also has been affected in different areas of importance. Teaching educational content had been compromised in

order to curb the pace at which the pandemic was going. This Research focused on the impact of the COVID-19 on learners at Selected Secondary Schools in Zomba.

1.2.2 Brief description of its emergence and Global response/WHO response

The first cases of the coronavirus were identified and reported in the City of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019. The virus started spreading across the world and by February 2020 it was named Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). By March 2020, the coronavirus had reached the southern African region and South Africa reported their first case, which was imported from Italy (NICD, 2020). The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to Africa raised huge concerns due to its already existing fragile health systems that are still battling the health-related impact of high infectious disease burden, which is devastating for human development and health (Nyasulu, 2021)

Many countries around the world cautioned the public to take responsive care using health strategies which mostly included handwashing, wearing face masks, physical distancing, overhaul of the existing healthcare system and avoiding mass gatherings and assemblies. In addition to that ‘Lockdowns’ and ‘staying at home’ strategies have been put in place with the aim of flattening the curve and controlling the transmission of the disease culminating into a complete nationwide lockdown that was implemented from 1 August 2020. As of July 2020, 98.6% of learners worldwide were affected by the pandemic, representing 1.725 billion children and youth, from pre-primary to higher education, in 200 countries (United Nations, 2020) and (Pokhrel, 2021).

1.2.3 COVID-19 pandemic: National Response

Malawi is a landlocked country on the Great African Rift Valley and lies on the western shores of Lake Malawi. It is bordered by Tanzania to the North, Zambia to the West and Mozambique to the East, South and West. Malawi had its first COVID-19 case on 02 April 2020, which was imported from India. By this time, the Malawian national level response and preparedness included restrictions on public gatherings, visitors entering borders, mandatory hand hygiene at its borders, and closure of schools (Nyasulu, 2021).

Being in a region where all of its bordering countries were registering cases of COVID-19, the risk was high and there were a lot of speculations about the virus making many people to be living in fear and with great anxiety. Malawi health system is under the Ministry of Health (MOH) which is an overseeing body of all health related matters in the country. While this is so, the health services in Malawi are provided to the public under MOH and the private sector. The private sector is grouped by those precisely aimed at profit-making and on the other hand those that are not specifically aimed at profit making, for example mission hospitals and other nonprofit making organisations (Munthali, 2020).

COVID-19 came at a time when the World Bank had projected that the political instability in 2019 would affect instability in 2019 would affect the country's economy because many businesses would be disturbed by political demonstrations. In addition to that, Malawi was also being affected as most of its medical supplies, raw materials, and other end products are imported from other countries. With the COVID-19 it meant that even farmers needed to reduce and eventually stop all

agriculture activities as one way of preventing the spread of the virus which was difficult and had a huge negative impact on Malawi economy (ibid).

Malawi has, for the past years faced some other epidemics and pandemics and it is still fighting others like Cholera and HIV/Aids. Despite this experience, the COVID-19 pandemic is another kind of the pandemic that has seen world powerful economies with improved and high rated medical health system struggling to prevent and control the spread of the virus including running out of testing material's, masks, ventilators and other essential medical equipment. As a result, there is need for proper prevention measures to be implemented in order to avoid the spread of the virus and that necessary arrangements have to be taken (Ibid).

The Malawi government endorsed commendable measures by appointing a Special Cabinet Committee on Corona virus which started functioning on 7th March 2020 with the purpose of providing policy management and looking into important matters concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to that, it declared the country as a state of disaster on March 21 2020 and thereby banned public gatherings including religious gatherings, wedding ceremonies and pubs as well as barring any street vending. On 23rd March 2020 the Ministry of Education announced school closures, colleges in both the public and private sector with the aim of fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the announcement of the state of emergency just like any other African country, the Malawi government also closed its land borders and restricted air flights with a special announcement of suspending all international flights starting from 1 April 2020 thereby allowing only transportation of goods and services that are indispensable to the country (Munthali, 2020)

People were communicated to on the prevention and control measures like using masks, washing their hands with soap, use of sanitizer and reporting to the nearest hospitals if they have any unusual symptoms with the aim of improving their hygiene as some of the ways laid out in helping to prevent and control the Virus. Self-quarantine measures were put in place to all visitors that may have arrived from high-risk areas (ibid).

Other key policies identified by the Malawi government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were multisectoral and implemented through 15 focused working groups termed clusters. Each cluster was assigned to be providing policy direction in their own area of focus which involved cancellation of public events, decongesting public transport and workplaces, mandatory face coverings as well as a testing policy covering symptomatic people. Supportive interventions comprised of risk communication and community engagement in multiple languages and over a variety of means, efforts to improve access to sanitation, water, nutrition and unconditional social-cash transfers for poor urban and rural households (Mzumara, 2021).

1.2.4 Closure of schools

More than 180 countries temporary school closures kept nearly 1.6 billion students out of school, further obscuring the global efforts of reducing learning poverty, portrayed through deprivations of schooling and learning in terms of learner admission and minimum proficiency based on a desired and agreed set of capabilities. The Malawi government ordered closure of all schools and educational institutions on 23 March 2020 with the aim of protecting learners, teachers and parents from the pandemic and supporting national efforts in the fight against the spread of the

coronavirus. The schools were closed for a period of 5 months for final year learners and 6 months for the rest from March to September 2020, which affected over 5 million learners in primary school (Chiwaula, 2021)

A group of students challenged this closure portraying it as unconstitutional and an infringement of their right to education but the court ruled that the declaration was lawful and constitutional. This was so because the declaration which had been issued vested such authority in the presidency and therefore did not breach any provision of the Malawian Constitution. The other point of contention raised by the applicants in the case was that the declaration of the state of national disaster derogated from the provisions of Section 44 of the Malawian Constitution. The section provides that there may be no restrictions or limits on the exercise of freedoms and rights under the Constitution unless these are lawful, reasonable, and recognized by international human rights standards as well as necessary in an open and democratic society. The court found the declaration reasonable because the pandemic was spreading everywhere globally therefore the risk of spread of the disease would have had catastrophic consequences. In the challenges to the lockdown decree, there had been confusion on whether the lockdown order was based on a declaration of a state of emergency governed by the Constitution or the declaration of a state of disaster (Tengatenga, 2021).

Of students who had been attending school prior to school closures, research shows that 86% returned when schools re-opened. Over 30% of those aged 17–19 did not return to school and dropouts were more pronounced among older girls. This further lowered the gender parity index to the greater disadvantage of girls. In addition to that

it was also discovered that students already lagging behind in school were more likely to drop out. Thus, the data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic magnified gender inequalities in schooling, at least partially erasing recent progress towards inclusive education. Officials in Malawi reported a rise in teen pregnancies compared to a similar period in 2019 and one in three girls said pregnancy was the reason they were not returning to school after the closures. (Chiwaula, 2021).

1.2.5 COVID-19 Statistics

By 31 March 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused 33,535 (prevalence: 0.2%) cases and 1116 (case fatality rate: 3.3%) deaths with the fatality rate in Malawi being higher than the global case fatality rate. Of which Lilongwe had 2.9%; Lilongwe is also the transportation center of Malawi, whereby different kinds of people from the neighboring countries like Tanzania relate and conduct their businesses with Malawians. This made it easier for the COVID-19 pandemic to be spread in the city. As of 31 March 2021, there were 7590 cases and 272 deaths in Lilongwe, accounting for nearly 23% of the cases within Malawi. (Li, 2021).

1.2.6 Mitigation

Individuals conduct was a crucial component in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In western democracies, personal, rather than government action, had been the most important issue. Seeking medical advice remotely unless having severe symptoms, early self-isolation, and social distancing were the key elements. The government actions to ban mass gatherings were significant, as are good diagnostic facilities and remotely accessed health advice, as well as specialised treatment for people with severe disease. Isolating towns or cities was not yet

considered as a part in the UK Government action plan. Investigation of individual interaction patterns suggests that contact tracing can be a successful policy in the early stages of an outbreak. (Anderson, 2020).

In addition to that, minimizing morbidity and associated mortality, keeping the effects on the economy within convenient levels, avoiding an epidemic peak that can overwhelm health-care services, and flattening the epidemic curve to wait for the development of the vaccine and manufacture on scale and antiviral drug therapies. In the end, the other important aspects left are voluntary plus mandated quarantine, closing educational institutes or work places where the infection has been identified, stopping mass gatherings and isolating households, towns, or cities (Ibid).

There is a need for the government to have a pandemic control plan in order to mitigate a future or continued increase in the current COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of inhibiting massive loss of its population and moderate the economic impact of such pandemics. In addition to that, the public health policies were supposed to be reviewed and politically evaluated as to what extent the political activities have impacted on the spread of the pandemic (Nyasulu, 2021)

Information campaigns were supposed to be added in order for the country to properly address the misunderstandings and knowledge gaps about the risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2 and the likelihood of severe illness due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People in Malawian villages hold different beliefs concerning the COVID-19 pandemic of which learners equally display at schools as well. For example, some

people think that they are not prone to acquire the new disease and some even think that this disease would never have serious consequences on their health (Banda, 2021)

1.2.7 Ministry of Education's response measures and opening of school

Lastly, in March 2020, The Malawi government announced its policy response starting from March to June 2020 (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events & Ministry of Health, Republic of Malawi, 2020). At this particular time, the number of people infected with the virus in Malawi had not been confirmed and the schools were still in progress, but it included information on the next step in the case of closing schools. For instance, the mass media usage in cooperation with telecommunication companies and promotion of learning from home including e-learning. These incorporated producing continuity programs to be broadcasted and disseminated on radio, TV and the internet, provision of resources such as textbooks, study guides, radios as well as equipment for the children coming from poorest background. In addition to that, making sure that children with disabilities and special educational needs are part of the continuity programs, as well as pinpointing and treating the underlying factors, for example poverty and gender which restricts the children from learning. Another example was that, approximately six million primary school learners benefited from an emergency radio which was airing since May 2020 until the end of the 2019/2020 school year (Sakaue, 2021).

1.2.8 National studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and learners in particular

All national educational systems were threatened by the instant effects due to closure of school and the economic declines brought by inevitable result of the mitigation policies against the pandemic. Due to the government's response to the impact of

school closures, most countries introduced distance learning systems. Yet, early reviews have shown that there is a tremendous difference in the availability and efficiency of these systems across countries, which results in widening learning inequalities mostly between rich and poor within the country, due to the digital divide. Even though high-income countries have the capability of introducing a system that allows educators and learners to have a two-way interaction, low income countries are not capable thereby relying on one –way tools, including radio and television (Sakaue, 2021).

Another point worth noting is that limited actions have been undertaken to support those who are excluded from the distance learning systems. Although high income countries have made strides in inaugurating a distance learning system capable of ensuring at least equitable access to education during the pandemic, evidence continually demonstrates that the learning inequality has broadened through the difference in its usage (Ibid).

Data from Denmark study found out that richer parents were more likely to take out children's digital books from the public libraries, resulting in an escalation in the inequality of learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Germany, the lessening in the learning time due to the closure of schools was higher among low-achieving learners than high- achieving learners. Rigorous data derived from high-frequency internet search information from the United States also discloses significant differences in engagement by different households and schools in online resources by SES groups (Sakaue, 2021).

The Cumulative total number of confirmed cases per 100,000 populations was the highest in Kenya, followed by Malawi and Uganda respectively. It is worth mentioning that the increasing number of overall deaths per 100,000 populations and the case mortality ratio is the uppermost in Malawi, whereas on the other hand the developmental level is the lowermost among the three selected countries. Although, provision of vaccination in all countries started around early March 2021, the vaccination rate remained low. The recent data had shown that the vaccination rate was the highest in Uganda and the lowest was in Malawi. As a matter of fact, all the three countries underwent different patterns of increase and decrease in the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases (Ibid).

1.3 Statement of the problem

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound repercussions on a global and national scale, permeating various facets of human existence (Noor, 2020). Its repercussions extend beyond the immediate health implications, encompassing ramifications for the economy, social dynamics, and individual lifestyles.

The imperative to address these multifaceted issues becomes evident, particularly in the context of the surviving family members grappling with the aftermath of the disease. COVID-19, claiming lives indiscriminately, has not only posed challenges to the overall well-being of individuals but has also significantly impacted the educational landscape, leading to the demise of learners and subsequently placing the remaining students in a state of bereavement. Compounded by the loss of parents, the affected learners encounter heightened difficulties in continuing their education, resulting in an alarming increase in dropout rates (Woods, 2020).

This widespread impact on learners necessitates an examination of the emerging challenges stemming from this context. Traditional schooling practices heavily reliant on face-to-face interactions, supplemented by some blended learning in more advanced educational institutions, have been disrupted. The conventional role of schools extends beyond imparting formal education, serving as environments that foster social interactions, friendships, routine, structure, nutrition, and safety for children (Putri, 2020). The ensuing absence of these essential interactions has prompted a need to address the challenges precipitated by the abrupt shift to online learning.

In adapting to the new paradigm of online education, learners have encountered various difficulties associated with the absence of face-to-face interactions. While virtual platforms facilitate interactions with teachers and peers, a teacher respondent specializing in first-grade education noted the inherent challenges in replicating the natural dynamics of in-person communication. The interactive online sessions, though a viable alternative, are characterized by a sense of awkwardness, with students not responding in the same manner as they would in traditional face-to-face settings (Putri, 2020).

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1.5.1 Main Research Questions

How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the students in secondary schools in Zomba?

1.5.2 Specific Research Questions

1. What social aspects of the students' lives did the COVID-19 pandemic affect?
2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in schools?
3. How the COVID-19 pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools?
4. How have schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic?

1.6 Significance of the study

The research will give an insight to learners on issues that relate to their growth and development in their daily lives that will initiate hard working spirit whether in good times or even bad times, for instance, during pandemics like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discovering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners will help increase public awareness of how crucial it is to provide full mental support to the learners if maximum potential in the educational system is to be achieved.

Guardians and parents will be able to adopt methods that are influential and beneficial to the learners on how to survive if another pandemic arises and also improve and build the learners abilities and capabilities in their school performance. Stakeholders

will benefit with the research since the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought are laid bare, therefore, the important gaps that delay progress in the educational system concerning the ultimate needs of learners during a pandemic that can arise will be filled.

This study is important since there is not much on this topic discussed in Malawian literature and this gives an opportunity for scholars and policy makers to learn from it for future use. In addition, stakeholders will work closely with others for the prevention of some problems that arose but were preventable. Through the data analysis of the research, future researchers will be able to explore areas that have not been researched which is valuable since the target area of focus is known.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the background information of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Malawian society. It has also discussed the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, specific objectives of the study and the significance of the study. The next chapter will focus on providing literature written by other researchers.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter provides the discussion on the social aspects of the students' lives which the COVID-19 pandemic affected. It describes how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the teaching and learning process in schools. It also discusses the impact of the pandemic on mental health of students. In addition to that, some discussions on the measures which the schools used in order to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic are explained.

2.2 Social aspects of the students' lives affected by COVID-19 pandemic

The change to virtual mode of teaching and learning limited socialisation routines and social contact which is a central part of the student's daily experience. Most students got used to learning face to face and daily interactions with other students, such that the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic brought in a kind of disruption to them. In addition, students worried about their health and this led to a lonely life and a disconnect with friends and family which made some of them to have anxieties and depression (Al-Maskari, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic hindered peer-to-peer impact in the school environment which motivates individuals to work hard and learn social skills, due to the introduction of online learning. Motivation is an important aspect to the learner since

they work actively towards a target, experience pleasure, love, actualization and satisfaction (Usmanovna, 2018).

Surveys show that socioemotional problems affect a significant proportion of students, with the most prevalent being getting bored easily, having difficulty in concentrating, not wanting to do schoolwork, and getting frustrated often. Additionally, between one quarter and one-third of children have been more conflictive, irritable, as well as experienced alterations in sleep and appetite. It is worth mentioning that socio- emotional measurements showed variations according to educational level, being secondary age students, especially those between 14 and 18 years old were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Reimers, 2022).

2.3 The effect of COVID 19 pandemic on the delivery of instruction in schools

The substitute for teaching in the classrooms has been emergency online teaching, which has faced various difficulties, for example inadequate and weak infrastructure, limited technical knowledge and tutoring capabilities, as well as issues with online connectivity. Likewise, inequalities of learning outcomes also happened in rural areas where there is unreliable power supply and Internet availability. Online lessons via Google Classroom, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams brought problems such as uncooperative learners, low attendance of learners, high-cost internet packages, limited availability of educational resources, low teachers technology confidence, lack of ICT knowledge and poor network infrastructure (Noor, 2020).

The pandemic increased teacher workload and stress while creating organizational and communication challenges among school staff and between the staff and parents.

Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic constrained both the home conditions and the school conditions that support access to school, regular attendance, and time spent in learning. Given the lower access that underprivileged students had to technology and connectivity and that most of their families were economically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was expected that the opportunities of the learners to learn was disproportionately reduced as compared to their peers which had more access to resources and were staying in less stressful living environments (Reimers, 2020).

As a result, most vulnerable students were more likely to disengage from school resulting into temporal school dropout (Edge, 2024). In addition to that, some pupils in Brazil had difficulties with access to equipment or connectivity. The schools addressed this by the provision of IT equipment to homes, allowing pupils with connectivity issues to come into schools, providing advice to families regarding connectivity, for example, advising them to use mobile phones to hotspot. This helped to ease the stress in all the actors involved in the learning process, for example, learners and parents (ibid).

Teachers have faced various challenges and difficulties in performing their role efficiently according to the stringent teaching practices and activities of today, including lesson planning and writing, controlling and managing students in the classroom, and meeting the varying needs of their learners (Noor,2020).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started students had problems including changes in relationships, health and mental health concerns, perceived social support, uncertainty about the future and educational challenges, lack of motivation and distractions, amongst others. The glitches discussed above directly affects focus and creativity in a

lot of learners which may lead to failure in class making the delivery of instruction to be hard on the teachers (Hatzichristou, 2021).

Furthermore, challenges in education were posed in relation to the teaching methodology, curriculum and integration of technological means in the learning process as well as in the form of online lessons. Eighteen per cent of teachers communicated doubts on whether things would be the same as before, having fear that the COVID-19 pandemic would affect human relations, among other areas. The other teachers actually were unable to plan for the future which is a shortcoming since teachers are supposed to plan ahead for easy teaching and learning (ibid).

In addition to that, the teachers had fear of getting infected and questioned whether they were safe at work especially regarding the current health issues in the schools and returning to the schools without the vaccine. Teachers reported increased levels of anxiety during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic while it was also noted that there was an imbalance between self-reported stress and effective coping. From the above statement, it can be argued that it was difficult to teach and deliver one's lesson amidst all the fear and stress (Ibid).

2.4 The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of students in schools

The negative impact on children's socio-emotional well-being due to school closures were also noted. A significant number (63%) responded that boredom was one of their biggest concerns. Worryingly, 59% also expressed that their child was sadder than usual, while nearly half noted changes in their child's behaviour, such as feeling more anxious or likely to be angrier than usual (37%) (Singal, 2021).

There have been reports of the psychological impact of the epidemic on the students, about 24.9% of students have experienced anxiety because of this COVID-19 outbreak. In addition to that, having a relative or acquaintance who is infected with COVID-19 is an independent risk factor for anxiety experienced. Students were also affected in this aspect, because they had one or more relatives who had been suffering from the pandemic. Students' mental health is greatly affected when faced with a public health emergency, and they need attention, assistance, and support from the community, family, and tertiary institutions. (Pragholapati ,2020).

Findings during the COVID-19 pandemic show that the majority of students strongly agreed to reduce gathering and going out. There were statistical differences between the different sexes of students in anxiety and panic risk exposure. Moreover, the anxiety and depression levels of students in China during the COVID-19 pandemic were higher than the level of the national norm (Pragholapati, 2020).

Reports show that there was an increase in the ant-social behaviors by the learners. Due to the extended school closures there were many parents and guardians who were having stress on the provision of child care and management of distance learning while the learners were out of school. In situations where employed parents had no alternatives, they frequently left the learners on their own when institutions close and this results in harmful behaviors such as influence of peer pressure and amplified substance abuse. It has been proved that protracted school closures with limited movements and lots of challenges among poor households have worsened cases of exposure to drug and substance abuse, pornographic materials, increased rape cases

and Gender Based Violence (GBV) including defilement of children (Ngwacho, 2020)

The disturbance in the learning processes further increased anxiety and uncertainty regarding the National Examinations, increased psychological trauma among learners, teachers and parents; inequality in the continuing online programs as many of the learners have no access to digital platforms because of lack of devices and internet connectivity at home. In addition to that, the different levels of parental knowledge and attitude had an impact as well since the parents are supposed to support children in learning, thus whatever the parents know it is passed on to their children (Ibid)

2.5 How schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID 19 pandemic

Schools were also instructed to conduct formative assessments during the first week of reopening in order to assess learners' retention during the school closures and continuous assessment during remedial lessons to track progress. Head teachers were given the responsibility of providing support to learners who had poor performance during the school closures and special attention was given to the students coming from poor households, disadvantaged areas as well as students with disabilities. Using approaches such as after school study classes, remedial or catch up classes and learning during school holidays (Chiwaula, 2021).

In addition, Head teachers had to ensure that the primary focus of remedial programs should be on early literacy, foundational skills and numeracy. Head teachers were also responsible in making sure that blended learning strategies were developed, such as school/home, especially for students with disabilities. Head teachers had to ensure

that substitute learning approaches such as workbooks with lesson notes and exercises were put into use (Ibid).

In Brazil, the ratification of the law assisted their recovery efforts whereby it guaranteed the placement of psychologists in Brazilian public schools in order to provide support to the students and educators throughout their entire education. The inclusion of psychologists in schools benefits educational institutions in the country by becoming “trauma-informed schools” through supporting learning, prioritizing the promotion of community healing and facilitating the recognition of shared and individual trauma. This encompasses of a key mitigation and recovery strategy, of which may be of great importance to all segments of society as students and educators begin to experience the long-term effects of COVID-19 associated traumas (Costin, 2022)

Chilean schools were allowed to use subsidies for technological resources, cleaning and disinfection of infrastructure, sanitation, resources for infrastructure modification, and other activities to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This was predominantly concentrating at low-resource students, technical/vocational schools, subsidized schools and rural or isolated areas. There was provision of computers and tablets along with broadband mobile phones and physical educational materials. In addition to that, the school feeding program had been sustained through the distribution of food boxes to families and also by arranging provision of discounts for public transportation (Bellei, 2022)

The presence of new forms of communication at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic opened the opportunity of new methodologies, creating activities that

maintained the students' attention. For instance, some teachers reported that they motivated uninterested students through activities on WhatsApp including rhymes, audio stories, tongue twisters, guessing games, or with relaxation and mindfulness exercises or others that help identify emotions through storytelling and games (Bellei, 2022).

School principals focused on learning development and student wellbeing during the COVID 19 pandemic, and they believed that the pandemic will make families value the work rendered by the teachers towards their children. The Principals also believed that appreciation towards the importance of students' socio-emotional wellbeing will help them to prepare for other potential crises, and they considered the period during the COVID 19 pandemic helped in fostering students' learning autonomy. Arguably, such interventions show support and assistance to the learners especially in the time of crisis like the COVID 19 pandemic (Ibid).

In Mexican Schools, apart from the design and distribution of educational materials, teachers were expected to keep in contact with students through phone calls, text messaging, video calls, and digital platforms. Teachers would assign homework and other learning activities and receive evidence of activities conducted at home. The schools also had call centers to support teachers and learners (Cárdenas, 2022).

2.7 Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the theory of ecological systems by a psychologist called Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005). This theory has been used because it best describes the relationship that exists between the learner and his surrounding and also how there is

interlocking of subject matter in the wholeness of the society. The theory describes the organization of the environment and how it affects human development through biological and environmental factors (Rider & Sigelman, 2009).

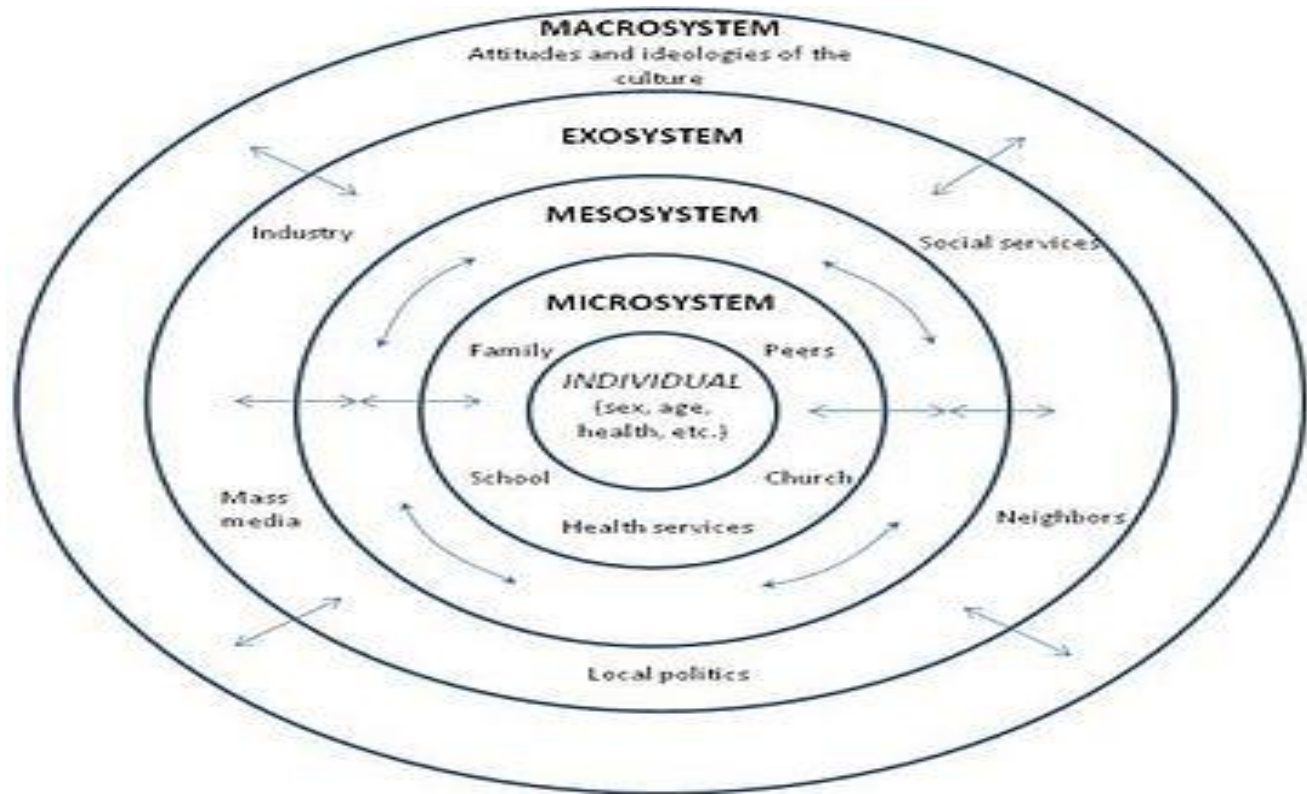


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Human Development

Source: www.en.wikipedia.org

Bronfenbrenner discussed that there are structures that are weaved and connected together which are explained as follows;

A microsystem which is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by a person that is developing in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit, engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in the immediate environment. (Bronfenbrenner, 2007). Examples include such settings as family, school, peer group and workplaces. It is within the immediate environment of the microsystem that proximal processes operate to produce and sustain

development, but as the above definition indicates, the ability of the structure to function depends on the content and structure of the microsystem.

It is also discussed that human development transpires thorough processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio psychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction has to be occurring on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The second one is mesosystem which comprises of the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing a developing person (e.g. the relations between home and school, school and workplace etc. In other words, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. An example is the developmental impact of two-way communication and participation in decision making by parents and teachers.

The other one is exosystems which comprise the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (e.g. for a child, the relationship between the home and the parent's workplace; for a parent, the relation between the school and the neighborhood peer group). This especially affects the development of children and youth indirectly through their influence on the family, the school and the peer group. (ibid).

A good example was reported in the schools by the learners whereby they said that the job redundancies that occurred at their parent's workplaces affected them greatly.

This was shown especially in the lowering in their standards of living and also they experienced extremely high levels of poverty in their respective homes.

The Macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro, meso and exosystems characteristics of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, material resources, bodies of knowledge, life styles, customs, opportunities structures, hazards and like course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems. The macrosystems may be thought of as a societal blue print for a particular culture or subculture. The formulation points to the necessity of going beyond the simple labels of class and culture to identify more specific social and psychological features at the macrosystem level that ultimately affect the particular conditions and processes occurring in the microsystem (Ibid). This could be explained in the situation of the COVID 19 pandemic whereby the teachers were explaining their concern especially on the student's actions towards the school's principles given during the pandemic of which the learners were disregarding the orders because of their parent's beliefs on the current pandemic.

The final structure is known as a chronosystem whose systems parameter extends the environment into a third dimension. An increasing number of investigators have employed research designs in which time appears not merely as an attribute of the growing human being, but also as a property of the surrounding environment not only over the life course, but also across historical time. A chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives for example changes over the life course in family structure, employment, socioeconomic status, place of residence or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life. An example was what happened

during the depression years whereby youngsters who were teenagers during those years, the families' economic deprivation appeared to have a salutary effect on their subsequent development, especially in middle class. As compared with the nondeprived who were matched on pre-depression socioeconomic status, deprived boys displayed a greater desire to achieve in life (ibid).

The theory describes socialization as the way of becoming a member of the society. Naturally, this theory allows better understanding on education and the problems attached to it. In our context of experiences of COVID-19 pandemic by the Secondary School students the theory describes well on the issue of the pandemic in relation to the challenges that arose in the education system (Härkönen, 2001).

In addition to that, the theory also explains that people infer meanings, engage in responsive coping processes and construct both formal and informal action plans. The processes are associated with emotions since human unpredictability represents both successes and failures of human coping processes. Within the social contexts of development, the character of perceptions made, inference of making meaning, contributes eventually to the variability of human coping and identity formation outcomes as lives unfold across the life course. The assumptions collected, inferences made, and coping patterns endorsed result from the quality of fit between the individual and the diverse contexts encountered. (Spencer, 2008). Furthermore, the theory brings into focus on the developing person with the education designed environment and the people in this environment with all interlacing personal relationships, roles, actions and processes (ibid).

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed some related literature on the social aspects of the students' lives which the COVID-19 pandemic affected. It described how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the teaching and learning process in schools. It also conversed the impact of the pandemic on mental health of students. In addition to that, discussion on the measures which the schools used in order to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic have been explained. Finally, it has ended with the theoretical perspective guiding this thesis. The next chapter will unveil the methods used to come up with the findings of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter issues out the research design and methods of study. First, a brief discussion of the research approach that was used in the study. Secondly, the description of the setting and the subject of concern, sampling methods, the sample size, data collection tools, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Approach

In order to fulfil the study objectives, a qualitative research was conducted in order to come up with required information on the experiences of secondary school learners in the COVID-19 pandemic period for samples of which the basic advantage, is that it offers a complete description and analysis of a research subject, without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participant's responses. appropriate for small samples, while its outcomes are not measurable and quantifiable (Hall, 2016).

Qualitative research involves the use and collection of a variety of empirical materials: case study, personal experience, life story, introspective, interview, observational, past, interactional, and visual texts that define routine and problematic moments as well as meanings in individuals' lives. (Denzin, 2005). This Research

mainly used a case study design to get information about the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the livelihood of the students affect their immediate surrounding and vice versa, the researcher thought that it was important to interview the people that surround the learner, for example, the head teacher, the counselor as well as the teachers. The researcher interviewed the others with the aim of coming up with a concrete layout of the extent to which their learners have been affected. The Researcher also interviewed learners and discussed issues on COVID-19 that affected them and hindered progress in their education. The research design that was used played an important role and helped the researcher to answer specific research questions and acted as a focus for the entire research (ibid).

Qualitative research requires credibility, transferability, dependability as well as confirmability in order to ensure the quality of the research (Ahmed, 2024). The Researcher followed every step of the discussed measures with the aim of producing rich and deep data.

3.3 Research Paradigm

Constructivism research paradigm was used in order to come up with information on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the learners through their first hand experiences. Since, constructivists assert that reality is subjective, it is from the individual perspective of participants engaged in the study which gave out thus multiple or varied experiences of the pandemic. This kind of approach aims at getting inside the head of the subjects that are being studied in order to speak, understand as well as interpret what the subject is thinking or rather the meaning that the individual

is making of the situation. Efforts are made in trying to understand the viewpoint and perspective of the subject being observed, rather than the point of view provided by the observer (Kivunja, 2017).

The hypothesis of subjectivist epistemology connotes that the researcher will interpret the meaning of their data through their own thinking and rational processing of the data through their interactions with participants. There is the understanding that the researcher would socially construct knowledge as an outcome arising from his or her personal experiences of real life contained by the natural settings being investigated (Ibid).

3.4 Research Design

The research used a case study to acquire important information pertaining to the issue explored. A case study is a research approach used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It can be used to explain, describe or explore events or phenomena in everyday contexts in which they occur; in this case, the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the learners. The case study approach can offer additional insights into what gaps exist in its delivery or why one implementation strategy might be chosen over another (Crowe, 2021). There is not much literature on the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the learners in Malawi and I personally believe that a discussion on the topic was relevant to our society.

3.5 Study Sites / Location

The study was carried out in three secondary schools in the city of Zomba. Two of these are boarding schools and one is a day secondary school. Zomba district is chosen for the research because the COVID- 19 pandemic also affected the city. Another justification is that the researcher lives in the Urban City of Zomba which made it easier to have access to the selected schools and conduct the research.

3.6 Study Participants

District/No. of Schools	Head Teachers	Teachers	School Counsellors	Students
Zomba 3 schools	3	3	3	30
Total	3 Interviews	3 Interviews	3 Interviews	30(3 FGDs)

3.7 Study Period

The Research was conducted within a period of 2 months (September 2023- November 2023).

3.8 Sampling Methods

Purposive sampling was used in order to come up with relevant and tangible information from the selected group of individuals which were interviewed. Purposive sampling provides researchers with the justification of making generalizations from the sample that is being studied, therefore it gave an overall view of how the pandemic had impacted the participants. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones

will be the most useful or representatives (Babbie, 2007). Therefore, Purposive sampling gave out a good reflection of the kind of data the study is looking for. The head teachers from the schools were informed that only the students and teachers who were affected by COVID-19 were the ones who were going to participate in the research.

3.9 Sample Size

The sample for the assessment had been drawn from the three secondary schools; and mainly learners from Form Three and Four. In each school 10 students were selected to participate in the focus group discussion and also the head teacher, teachers as well as the school counselor. The researcher had to seek out participants with specific characteristics to explain and discuss their experiences concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and how it had affected their school lives (Rai, 2015)

Table 1: Participants' Gender and Institution

Institution	Male	Female	Total
Secondary School A	5	5	10
Secondary School B	5	5	10
Secondary School C	5	5	10
Total	15	15	30

Form 3 and 4 students are the ones who were selected on the assertion that these students were present at the school when the country was experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, they have desirable traits as compared to others such that they would give important information needed for the research.

NB: All the participants were conversant with English therefore the Interviews were being conducted in English; therefore, no translation had been done.

3.10 Data Collection Tools

The tools which were used in this research were through interviews, document review and data analysis. With the focus group discussion, the researcher was asking questions to the group of students to get different kinds of responses (see appendix E). The Researcher conducted three focus group discussions in total; one in every secondary school. The first questions required simple responses then in depth and long answers were required. The responses started from the main setting which is the school and what was happening in the immediate setting followed by the experiences at the connected setting, for example, home and the parents work places.

In addition to that, on focus group discussions, the researcher gathered learners with similar characteristics or having shared experiences to discuss in order to produce rich data from them. Focus group discussion is a technique whereby the researcher gathers a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction. The researcher had to employ face to face interactions with the individuals as well as taking down notes in order to get important information (Nyumba, 2018).

The setting of the interview requires elaboration; therefore, the interviews of the counselors and Head teachers were conducted in their respective offices as they personally suggested as their comfort zones. The teachers were questioned by the researcher of which they responded from their prior experiences on COVID-19 (see

appendix B, C and D). The questions were qualitative in nature whereby they had to explain what really happened during the time. The first part contained general information of the disease that the individuals had knowledge on, followed by how the pandemic affected the students, teachers and finally the school as a whole. The study sought to explore the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba.

However, the researcher was very flexible in carrying out the interviews and used a semi-structured form of interview as well as follow up questions from the answers which were being asked. Interviews provide a direct and straightforward approach to collecting detailed and rich data regarding a particular phenomenon. Open-ended questions encourage informants to explain their exclusive perspectives which would provide an in depth of the occurrences of issues during the pandemic. (Barrett, 2018).

3.10.1 Data Management Methods

The Data was collected in notepads where the researcher was writing on while conducting the interviews. In addition to that, papers were used for the respondents to use when signing consent forms. The researcher was also recording the interviews so that afterwards he could listen to the interviews properly and come up with relevant information. Afterwards, the data generated was entered into the computer hard drive for storage sake. The interpretation of data was done later.

3.10.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done inductively from the data collected from the study. Conclusions were drawn from the collected data while applying reasoning or data

analysis strategies. The researcher started the analysis by slowly moving from specifics to generalisations. In doing this, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) caution researchers that in a constructivist paradigm data analysis, they are constructing a picture of the phenomenon that takes shape as they collect, examine and analyse the parts of the data collected. Therefore, tracking of their own influence on a setting, to remove their own biases, and emotional responses as they construct meanings that clearly paint the real picture of the phenomenon studied (Young, 1994). The data collected passed through inductive analysis involving data coding, data categorizing as well as interpreting before providing a concrete explanation.

3.11 Foreseeable and unforeseeable adverse events

The Research had been planned out in a way that ensures that all foreseeable and unforeseeable events were considered. The data was kept safe at all means necessary for the confidentiality of the participant and also for the future use of research. In addition to that, contact details of the researcher and the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) had been included in the consent form for easy reporting of the participant if they happen to encounter any problem.

3.12 Ethical considerations

As per requirement this study applied all the ethics as well. Participants were informed that the information acquired from the study would be held in strict confidentiality. The participants were provided with an informed consent form beforehand in order for them to read the requirements and expectations of the study. The study was being conducted with guidance from codes of conduct on human rights with the aim of maneuvering the research with no breaching of rights of individuals in

any aspect of life (Kaiser,2009). Permission was sought from appropriate offices to interview sources for example The University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) in consideration of the privacy of the individuals. Concerned authorities were informed in time to avoid unnecessary inconveniences that may occur when research is being conducted.

For Secondary School A, the Head Teacher linked the researcher to the Deputy Head teacher who was involved in selecting students to take part in the study. The respondents were briefed prior to the discussions on the confidentiality of the study and what to expect in the research. In addition to that, participants were adequately informed about the research, they comprehended the information and had a power of freedom of choice to allow them to decide (Arifin, 2018).

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has dealt with the issues of the research design and methods of study. It gave out a brief discussion of the research approach that was used in the study. It also provided the description of the setting and the subject of concern, sampling methods, the sample size, data collection tools, data analysis, benefits of the study and ethical considerations considered during the generation of the data. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents findings and discussions of results obtained from an analysis of in-depth interviews, reflective narratives and focus group discussions. The goal of the study was to explore the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba. The Chapter starts with the respondents' characteristics, and then discussion of the findings according to the four sub-research questions namely: What social aspects of the students' lives did the COVID-19 pandemic affect? How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in schools? How the pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools? How have schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic?

4.2 Respondents' Characteristics

The participants in this study came from three secondary schools in Zomba. Secondary School A and C were boarding school where students came from surrounding areas mostly rural areas while Secondary School B was a day secondary school with students from all over the city. Forms 3 and 4 were targeted, therefore students were from these classes.

Table 2: Respondents' Characteristics

Institution	Age	Class
Secondary School A	10-18 years	Form 3-4
Secondary School B	10-18 years	Form 3-4
Secondary School C	10-18 years	Form 3-4

The learners were aged 10 to above 18 and we targeted those in form 3 and 4 because they were in school during the COVID-19 pandemic therefore they were able to share first-hand information about their experiences. In all the Secondary Schools (A, B and C) the respondents were Form 3 and 4 learners.

4.3 Social aspects of the student's life the COVID-19 pandemic affected

The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes in the livelihoods of learners. It affected the student's lives in many aspects of their day to day activities. The social aspect was one of the areas that was reported to be greatly affected. Discussion with the participants provided the layout of the extent to which the pandemic brought changes in the social lives of the people.

4.3.1 Students' perceptions of the social impact of COVID 19

The respondents discussed that the social aspect that was mainly affected was socializing with others since there was restrictions on movements and public places

gatherings. The students used to engage in activities like traditional and cultural dances, football games, drama clubs, parties, educational trips, wedding ceremonies and religious gatherings before COVID-19 pandemic came. There were changes like banning of different gatherings and also learning to survive alone due to the death of parents and guardians. Student 1 and Student 2 responded that:

“I was personally sad because I loved to watch Mganda but since the country banned all public gatherings it affected me greatly.” (Student 1, Mulunguzi Secondary School). “The coming in of the COVID-19 pandemic removed my good vibes and made me become too moody. I was someone who loved going to parties until the restrictions came along and took away my happiness” (Student 2, Likangala Secondary School)

The pandemic biosafety protocols were disturbing daily social activity in the society, there were changes in daily-life routines, which include constraints on outdoor physical activities; social restrictions which deprived individuals of social support and adaptive coping strategies (Clemente-Suárez, 2021).

The students reported that the challenges they were facing in their homes included; starvation resulting from bread winners job redundancies, loss of interest in education since they were on holiday for a long time, extreme poverty since many people depended on long distance trade which was banned at that time, and this triggered stress and anxiety to those who lost their relations and also losing many family members and friends due to the disease. Student 3 reported that:

“My uncle lost his job during the COVID-19 pandemic due to redundancies at his workplace. It brought problems in our family which led to lowering in the

living standards of the household. We were forced to be buying a bucket of maize from the market of which was also very expensive due to the rising of prices the country” (Student 3, Mulunguzi Secondary School)

The pandemic introduced additional challenges such as adverse health impacts in the household, from COVID-19 pandemic and economic impacts through parental job loss (Jain, 2020). This point supports the idea that the changes in the parents lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the students’ lives as well.

The group members at the Secondary Schools reported that the measures which they used in the group meetings in order for the activities to continue were social distancing, washing hands with soap, putting on masks and suspending some public gatherings. Student 4 and Student 5 expressed similar views that:

“Even though it was hard to convince other students come to the group meetings while putting on masks, we tried our best to educate them on such, bearing in mind that if they don’t comply with the rules the group will be dismissed completely”

(Student 4, Likangala Secondary School)

“Many students did not like the thought of putting on masks such that we had to force them to do it by hitting them with the ‘we will stop the group meetings’ phrase”
(Student 5, Mulunguzi Secondary School)

People were communicated on the prevention and control measures like using masks, washing their hands with soap, use of sanitizer and reporting to the nearest hospitals if they had any unusual symptoms (Munthali, 2020). The communication that was given

helped a lot to the people who had functions to attend to, as supported by the provided information.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic there were about 45 students in their drama club and decreased to 25 after the pandemic. The challenges of the group were that some members quit being part of the club and also parents told the learners to stop associating with others. Student 4 reported that:

“My parents did not want me and my siblings to be moving around anyhow and meeting up with my own friends because they said that I can bring the COVID-19 pandemic home and pass it on to them. They were really strict on me”. (Student 4, Likangala Secondary School)

This could be linked to the theoretical framework that was discussed which shows a link between what happens in the schools to the students and the happenings that occur in their respective homes. The stakeholders engaged in the help of the students Secondary School B were head teachers, directors of the drama clubs and other organizations.

At Secondary School C, there was more than 30 students in their wildlife club and they had been engaging in activities like tree planting exercises. They always met once in every week. The main challenge was cancellation of trips to other places because of COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to that, the demand for social distancing and self-isolation led to individuals becoming stressed. Students responded that:

“The self-isolation imposed on us made me become less focused on books and my studies which made me disturbed, frustrated and angry with myself (Student 5, Masongola Secondary School). “I had negative thoughts

especially of killing myself because I felt isolated from others and I was always irritated easily (Student 6, Mulunguzi Secondary School).

“I personally got used to meeting with friends and chatting at the school trips but all these came to a stop resulting into me being anxious and worried about what would happen next; due to the bad news that came up daily on the news because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Student 7, Likangala Secondary School).

Some emotions felt by people experiencing stress included; having negative thoughts, anxiety, fear, worry, sadness, tearfulness, loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities, frustration, irritability, anger, restlessness or agitation, a feeling of helplessness and disconnectedness from others, difficulty in concentrating and trouble relaxing or sleeping (Rawat, 2020).

4.3.2 School Counselors’ perceptions of the impact of COVID 19

The School Counselors reported that, before COVID-19 pandemic came the students used to participate in different school activities and also extracurricular activities for example dancing, football games as well as chatting with one another. In addition to that, some of them used to attend part time classes. When COVID-19 pandemic came in, it became difficult to have normal interactions due to social distance and also in terms of class discussions it was difficult for the students to relate and interact while putting on masks. School Counselor 1 expressed the view as follows:

“Some learners were enjoying themselves because there was less discussion and interactions among the students as well as with the teachers but the majority of them had difficulties to grasp the contents without discussion. At the end of the day, this brought in problems that needed to be addressed and attended to by the school counselor, bringing in much workload for me”

(School Counselor 1, Mulunguzi Secondary School).

The School Counselors revealed that the three secondary schools did not administer online classes mainly because almost 100 percent of them are coming from very poor and humble backgrounds therefore they do not have access to the internet. Possibly, just a little follow up to the parents and guardians on the students' school work being done in the homes; but a higher percentage did not make any follow ups once the schools were closed. In Malawi only 6% access the internet, 11% can access the TV and 33% have access to the radio and it is estimated that over 60% of primary and secondary schools did not have access to remote learning resources. Sakaue (2021) made similar observations for schools in Uganda.

4.4 The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of instruction in schools

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected how different schools brought about the learning process. This was so, because the Ministry of Education gave orders on how the schools should administer classes and provide the learning process in ways that would be helpful to the students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Different schools used different ways to ensure that learning was made easier despite the situation of the education sector and the country as a whole. Interviews were conducted in order to find out how the pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in the schools.

4.4.1 Teachers' perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of instruction in schools

The teachers revealed that there was a change in terms of how to teach and provide relevant information to the students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher 1 from Secondary School A responded that:

“We had to be restructured the system in terms of number of classes to be taught. At first Secondary School A had 3 streams but when the pandemic arose we had to add one more class to make sure that the measures are followed properly. This was a challenge in itself because there was no space for teaching and learning which made us to start using the multipurpose halls and laboratories when teaching in order to accommodate the students”

(Teacher 1, Mulunguzi Secondary School).

Given the above explanation, it is worth noting that other researchers supported the proposition. A change in the learning process brought about problems like uncooperative learners, low attendance of learners, teachers’ technology confidence and limited availability of educational resources (Noor 2020).

The study showed that the teachers had to use other strategies, like giving assignments to avoid contact with the students which was different before COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher 2 from Secondary School B shared her experience that:

“Even though the school expected classes to progress, we were scared to be teaching because we viewed the environment to be dangerous and contaminated which also changed the teaching and learning environment. We had to teach with masks on and make sure we use hand sanitizers when marking the assignments” (Teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School).

The above statement suggests that there were indeed problems in the delivery of instruction. Teachers were facing various challenges and difficulties in performing their role efficiently according to the current stringent teaching practices and activities. These practices and activities included lesson planning and writing,

controlling and managing students in the classroom, and meeting the varying needs of their learners (Noor,2020).

Furthermore, the study showed that, there were high levels of absenteeism among the students because of fear of contracting the disease. Attending classes once in two days also led to increased absenteeism among learners, especially young learners in some schools. Young learners, more especially those whose parents did not have interest in education ended up being absent from school on the days they are supposed to be in school (Chiwaula, 2021).

In conclusion, the response was that; to an extent the mode of teaching was effective even though it was not working perfectly because the students were not able to have discussions since it was more of teacher centered. The teacher as a guide is expected to provide the best way in the teaching and learning process so that it will not burden the students; there should be understanding between the two parties so that they both get positive and beneficial outcomes (Saputri, 2021).

4.4.2 Head Teachers' perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of instruction in schools

The Head teachers expressed their concerns on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction especially how their teachers were supposed to manage the classroom amidst the virus and they had to face different obstacles. Their views are as follows:

“The teachers had to teach and make sure that the students pay attention, write the assignments in class and do not indulge in deviant behaviors although it was

difficult for them to manage the class at the same time trying to prevent the virus from being spread (Head teacher 1, Mulunguzi Secondary School)

“My teachers were afraid of contracting the COVID-19 pandemic such that the discussions in their respective classes were held in a difficult situation because most of them were uncomfortable and it was hard for them to be obedient and take orders from the teachers (Head teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School).

The discussion above relates to what other researchers have explained. For example, Noor,2020 observed that teachers have faced various challenges and difficulties in performing their role efficiently according to the stringent teaching practices and activities of today, including lesson planning and writing, controlling and managing students in the classroom, and meeting the varying needs of their learners.

In addition to that, the Head teachers also explained that, the mode of learning used at that time in the schools was mostly the lecture method which was not really effective because there was less interaction in between the students and also between the students and their teachers. Head teachers from Secondary School A and B argued on the same concept as follows:

“We were receiving complaints from the teachers reporting that the students were raising concerns about the mode of learning; saying that they could not understand the teachers when teaching because of the mask they were putting on” (Head teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School).

“My students were having a hard time to grasp what they were being taught because of the distance that was placed between the teachers and the students.

This was a problem especially considering the masks that the teachers were assigned to be putting on every time they were teaching”

(Head teacher 3, Masongola Secondary School).

The explanation above shows that the teaching environment was not really good and helpful to meet the needs of the learners. In the end, the students are not motivated to work hard, pursue their dreams and reach the desired goal which they want. Just as Szabó, 2019 observed that the relationship between the student and the teacher has been claimed to be a major driver of the motivation to learn.

The head teachers reported that, before the orders from government to close schools their teachers were affected mainly because some teachers had underlying conditions like diabetes which were taken as a threat in terms of contracting COVID-19 pandemic. Head teachers from C explained their views as follows:

“The teachers here were diagnosed with the pandemic of which some of them were already having underlying issues like asthma and diabetes which made them to be much vulnerable and were given permission to rest. This brought in a decrease in the number of teachers expected to be teaching bearing in mind that the number of classes had increased due to the division of classes in the process of preventing the spread of the virus”

(Head teacher 3, Masongola Secondary School).

In conclusion, the delivery of instruction was affected in all areas in the school making it difficult for the students, teachers and the head teachers as well. This is explained clearly in the theoretical framework whereby one aspect affects the surrounding areas of which is shown by how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected even the delivery of instruction in the schools.

4.5 The COVID 19 effects on mental health of students in schools

The study reported that the students experienced feelings of fear, disappointment, anxiety and some were scared. In order to cope with COVID-19 pandemic they found hobbies like singing, praying, watching movies, listening to the radio and even some resorted to reading interesting novels. They were given help to cope up with the pandemic especially by friends on social media, parents, close friends, pastors as well as health practitioners. Two students from Secondary School A and Secondary School B expressed similar opinions concerning their experiences:

“When the COVID-19 pandemic arose I was really afraid, plus the news that people were dying of it actually made me anxious. In the process of thinking what to do next, I developed the thought of writing songs and singing. It made me relieved of my anxiety” (Student 5, Mulunguzi Secondary School)

And another said:

“I’ve always been passionate about music, but it was hard for me to start singing because of being busy with school engagements. When the COVID-19 pandemic came in, I was really confused, then afterwards we were divided into different shifts at our school which made me start dividing my time and start concentrating in my singing (Student 6, Likangala Secondary School).

This finding agrees with the discussions from the literature review which explained that; individual stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic included confinement, losing routine, confusion, uncertainty, fear of contagion, reduced concentration, diminished physical activity and sunlight exposure, sleep disorders, heavy use of digital media, variations in eating routines (Clemente-Suárez, 2021).

A significant portion of young people, likely 30 to 40 percent, have experienced negative impacts on their mental or social-emotional health especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hamilton,2021). At Secondary School A, the students were overwhelmed mainly because of the deaths that was being aired or published on social media which made them to be anxious of the whereabouts and health of their parents and guardians. Most of them went to the administration to call the parents since COVID-19 pandemic affects old people compared to the younger generation.

In conclusion, the findings have provided information showing that the students mental health was affected as discussed by other researchers in the reviewed literature and also directly linked to the discussion in the theoretical framework. Students' mental health is greatly affected when faced with a public health emergency, and they need attention, assistance, and support from the community, family, and tertiary institutions. (Pragholapati, 2020).

4.5.1 Head Teachers perceptions on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health of students in schools

The head teachers reported that, since the boarding schools were not closed it made the students to be mentally affected because they were just hearing news of deaths ranging from high profile people to local people. Head Teacher 3 from Secondary School C:

“Our students were mentally and psychologically affected because they were stuck in one place which was not their home. The students would always come to the administration stressed and ask for permission to use phones in order for them to call their parents and know about the situation at home” (Head Teacher 3, Masongola Secondary School)

The above discussion expresses the situation that was happening in the schools and this is the agreement with Li and Leung (2020). Secondary School A also had similar explanations on the mental of their students. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened students' mental health due to limited interactions, academic disruption, health-related fears, and the loss of normal routines (Li and Leung, 2020).

The challenges faced in the course of helping the mental health of the students as reported by the head teachers included ignorance on how to handle the mental problems of the students. Head Teacher 1 from Secondary School A explained that:

“Since it was the first time to face a pandemic like the COVID-19; I was having a hard time in necessitating the school counselors in providing psychological counseling because it was new to all of us (Head Teacher 1, Mulunguzi Secondary School).

In addition to that, they had fear of contracting the disease whereby even if they had something to communicate with the others they did not which was more of a disadvantage. The study revealed that, the head teachers worked as a team with form teachers, special needs teachers, heads of department, hostel masters, matrons, other teachers and other support staffs in order to help the mental health of the students.

4.5.2 Measures initiated to help the mental health of the students

The study revealed that guidance and counseling about the pandemic was mostly used by the teachers to help the students and encourage them daily during the pandemic so that even if they were found with the COVID-19 pandemic they should have hope that they will get better after receiving treatment at the hospital. School Counselor 2 from Secondary School B explained that:

“In our school, we made sure that we explained everything about the causes, transmission and prevention of the disease to the students so that they are knowledgeable and make good choices every day since the pandemic stayed for a longer time than expected”

(School Counselor 1, Likangala Secondary School).

Counseling is an individualized and personalized process for helping the individual to learn and acquire habits, attitudes, skills and interests which makes the person to be a normally adjusted being (Rahman, 2023). The study revealed that the teachers mostly worked with other teachers, health practitioners, support staff, ministry officials to monitor the situation in the school and help the student's mental health.

School Counselors were explained to the learners that were infected with the disease, and hence they encouraged the learners to accept and follow the COVID-19 pandemic measures. Learners who lost their parents and guardians, were offered counseling sessions to find ways of helping them. Guidance and counseling can be used as therapy for individuals with specific personal problems and also it can be the foundation of a more general life skills training programs for building up the students' personal resources in order to cope effectively with their future lives (Rahman, 2023). The study revealed that learners in secondary schools were resentful and doubted the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The mental health of the learners during the pandemic was affected a lot, but after counselling, most of them normalized. School Counselor 3 from Secondary School C explained that:

“The beliefs that the students held towards the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for me to start uprooting it. This is because most of them believed that it was just a myth and they used to reject point blank when being told

important information” (School Counselor 2, Masongola Secondary School)

The School Counselors worked hand in hand with form, teachers, head teachers in the work of handling the learners and also helping their mental health.

4.6 Support rendered by schools in helping students to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

The study showed that the school counselors played the role of being a counselor, advocate, teacher and guide to the learners in the course of supporting them during the COVID-19 pandemic. School counselors have unique training in addressing all students’ academic, career, and social/emotional development needs as well as making a positive impact on student achievement, attendance, and behavior (ASCA,2019).

The study revealed that the school counselors were engaging with other professionals like the health experts, other teachers and support staff like cooks, to be giving out food that would be beneficial to the health of the learners. School counselors collaborate and consult with various stakeholders such as administrators, teachers, parents, and their communities to create prevention and intervention programs for crisis response. (Jackson, 2018).

The study revealed that schools were receiving assistance from various stakeholders for example well-wishers, teachers, school administration, medical personnel as well as organizations like World vision, Save the children as well as school alumni. They provided soaps, buckets, sanitizers for the students and teachers to be using in their respective classrooms. Supportive interventions included risk communication and

community engagement in multiple languages and over a variety of mediums, efforts to improve access to water, sanitation, nutrition and unconditional social-cash transfers for poor urban and rural households. (Mzumara,2021).

The study found out that the strategies that were being implemented were not 100 percent effective as per say because sometimes the learners showed disbelief and did not accept the help. Fear was constantly being displayed and discussed among the learners leading to in effectiveness of the help being rendered.

4.6.1 How schools supported students cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

The study revealed that the schools had guidelines which they followed during the COVID-19 pandemic in order for the students to cope up with the pandemic which included the washing of hands when entering as well as leaving the school premises. Head Teacher 2 from Secondary School B explained that:

“We put buckets of water and soap in every classroom and gave orders to our students to be washing their hands with soap, they were told to be putting on masks to prevent the spread of the virus and also they were expected to observe social distance in and out of their classrooms”

(Head Teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School).

The above discussion shows that the Head Teachers were abiding by the orders given to the schools by the authorities. The Ministry of Education developed guidelines which the learners, teachers and other stakeholders in schools should follow (MoE, 2020a). This was done to curb the spread of the coronavirus in schools and it focused on training, quality instruction, sanitation and hygiene, social distancing, the use of face masks and disease monitoring and management (Chiwaula, 2021).

The schools supported the students in different ways including: provision of guidance and counseling; providing masks and making the sickbays conducive to the sick students; head teachers inviting health officials to come and test the students and also to provide health talks on the important issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic as well as giving an overview on the numbers of students that were found positive with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to that, the school management were buying soap to clean the floors of the classrooms as well as hostels; they provided chlorine which was used in the urinals and also on the beds of the hostels. The strategy of spraying hostels and classrooms was considered effective because after some time after spraying, the numbers of COVID-19 cases decreased.

4.6.2 Challenges faced by the schools in the course of supporting the students

The study revealed that the schools experienced financial difficulties. The Head teachers from schools voiced out their worries:

“Most students in the schools come from far rural areas which made it difficult for us to be hiring a car to be ferrying these learners to their homes once they were diagnosed with the COVID-19 pandemic”

(Head teacher 3, Masongola Secondary School).

“I was put in a corner because the school had no money at this time but there was a need to help the students go back home when they were showing symptoms and were found that they were sick”

(Head teacher 1, Mulunguzi Secondary School).

The head teachers reported that it was very costly and that the funds used for the transportation was just diverted from other funds that could have been used for other necessities in the school which made the other important issues not to be solved.

Another challenge reported by the Head teachers was that some teachers were infected with the COVID-19 pandemic and some even died from the pandemic which brought fear to the students and the other teachers as well.

As one Head teacher observed:

“My school was affected too because I had teachers and students who were diagnosed with the COVID-19 pandemic and some were really sick, bringing in much fear in the school (Head teacher, Masongola, Secondary School)

“Our school was one of the schools which was badly affected because we had cases of students and teachers that were diagnosed with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to that, one teacher died due to the same COVID-19 pandemic. May His Soul Rest in Peace. (Head teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School) quotes

This made it harder for the teachers to keep on supporting the learners since they had issues to handle in their personal lives making the students to suffer alone.

It is also reported that some students when they were told to go home especially in the boarding schools, did not want to take the guidance and counseling given in the schools by the management. This was so because they were coming from very poor homes and also sometimes being raised by their grandparents so they preferred to be at school and be receiving food three times a day than to go home and only have one meal per day.

4.6.3 Stakeholders that rendered help to the schools in supporting the students

The study shows that all the three selected schools did not close but rather continued to progress with the help of different stakeholders. There are different stakeholders that took part in helping and facilitating ways of how the schools should function amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the stakeholders reported to have been putting an effort is the Ministry of Education. The Head Teachers from Secondary School B and C expressed their views on the matter:

“Ministry of Education in Malawi played an important role in helping and supporting the learners during the pandemic. They brought tents here to be used as classes since the students had to be observing social distancing therefore there had to be division of classes (Head Teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School)

“My school had no vehicle to be used in ferrying the sick or buying protective kits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to the Ministry of Education who borrowed us the vehicle to be used by the school in running the errands” (Head Teacher 3, Masongola Secondary School)

The given statements from the head teachers show how the Ministry of Education helped the schools in the time of the crisis. Secondary School A had a similar opinion with the other schools.

Other stakeholders who rendered help during the COVID-19 pandemic included officials from Ministry of Health. Head teacher 2 explained that:

“Our school received help from the Ministry of Health who used to send their health officials into the school to test the students if they were infected by the virus. This was really helpful because it helped us to know the number of students infected and

devise ways on how to reduce the number (Head teacher 2, Likangala Secondary School).

Upon visiting Masongola Secondary School, the Head teacher added that:

“Apart from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, my school also received help from the PTAs, well-wishers and members of staff who constantly came to help in spraying the hostels and classrooms with proper medications.

The discussion has given us a picture on how different stakeholders brought about change in helping the schools to function amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed on the respondents’ characteristics, discussion of the findings according to the four sub-research questions namely: What social aspects of the students’ lives the COVID-19 pandemic affected; How the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in schools; How the pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools and How the schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to that, it explored on challenges faced by the schools in the course of supporting the students and also interventions of the stakeholders that rendered help to the schools in supporting the students.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present a conclusion to the study. The researcher also provides a summary of the major findings and lays out the gaps that other researchers may use in studies to be conducted in the future. The chapter concludes with a summary.

5.2 Summary of Key findings

This study explored the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba. The aim was to discuss to what extent the pandemic affected the students in different aspects of their lives which could have hindered the learning process and destabilized the progress of education in the areas. The area of focus was on the social, mental health, delivery of instruction as well as the help rendered to the students by different stakeholders.

Chapter one has provided a background context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Malawian society. It also discusses the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, specific objectives of the study and the significance of the study. The outline of the thesis has been specified in the chapter.

Chapter 2 discussed some related literature on the social aspects of the students' lives which the COVID-19 pandemic affected. It described how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the teaching and learning process in schools. It also conversed the impact of the pandemic on mental health of students. In addition to that, discussion on the measures which the schools used in order to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic have been explained. Finally, it has ended with the theoretical perspective guiding this thesis. Chapter 3 dealt with the issues of the research design and methods of study. It gave out a brief discussion of the research approach that will be used in the study. It also provided the description of the setting and the subject of concern, sampling methods the sample size, data collection tools, data analysis, and ethical considerations considered during the generation of the data. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study.

Chapter 4 presented on the respondents' characteristics, discussed the findings according to the four sub-research questions namely: What social aspects of the students' lives did the COVID-19 pandemic affect; How the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in schools; How the pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools; How schools have supported students cope with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to that, it explored on challenges faced by the schools in the course of supporting the students and also discussed the stakeholders that rendered help to the schools in supporting the students.

5.3 Conclusions

In view of the findings of this study, the following are some of the conclusions that the study has generated:

5.3.1 Impact on Social Aspects of Students' Lives:

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected various social aspects of students' lives, particularly their ability to engage in traditional social activities such as cultural dances, sports, drama clubs, parties, educational trips, weddings, and religious gatherings. Movement restrictions and the banning of gatherings led to changes in daily routines, isolation, and the need to adapt to new coping mechanisms.

Challenges in students' homes included adverse health effects, economic impacts like job redundancies, extreme poverty due to trade restrictions, and stress and anxiety resulting from the loss of family members and friends. The measures taken included social distancing, hand washing, mask-wearing, and the introduction of online learning.

5.3.2 Impact on Mental Health:

The pandemic had a substantial impact on the mental health of students. Feelings of fear, disappointment, anxiety, and sadness were prevalent. Challenges included disruptions to routine, uncertainty, fear of contagion, and diminished physical activity. Students coped through various activities such as playing video games, singing, praying, watching movies, and reading novels.

Challenges related to mental health varied across schools. Some students experienced overwhelming anxiety, while others appeared less affected. School counselors played a crucial role in offering guidance and counseling sessions to help students cope with the mental health challenges posed by the pandemic.

5.3.3 Education Delivery Challenges and Responses:

The delivery of instruction in schools faced challenges, including the restructuring of class systems, increased absenteeism, and fear among both teachers and students. Modes of learning, primarily face-to-face interactions, were impacted, leading to a shift in teaching strategies such as assigning self-marked assignments to avoid contact.

The mental health of teachers was also affected, with concerns about safety and fear of contracting the virus. Teachers implemented preventive measures in classrooms, such as hand washing facilities. However, the effectiveness of these measures varied, and the challenges of mask-wearing and limited interaction were noted.

Overall, the findings emphasize the multifaceted challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic on students, including disruptions to social life, mental health concerns, and alterations in educational delivery. The study underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems, guidance and counseling services, and strategic interventions by educational stakeholders to address the diverse impacts of the pandemic on the academic and well-being aspects of students.

5.4 Implications

The following are the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and their attendant implications:

1. There has been low performance in classes due to the reported high levels of absenteeism in the Secondary Schools. I recommend serious supervision of the class work from the school administration during pandemics like COVID-

19 pandemic to enable the students to continue with their education despite the challenges.

2. There are high levels of school drop outs because of the changes that occurred during the pandemic that brought in less motivation to the students. Stakeholders surrounding the learners should initiate programs that will foster hard work, motivate them and teach them the benefits of being educated.
3. There were high levels of teenage pregnancies reported during the COVID-19 pandemic since the students had much free time and idle time which they spent on irresponsible behaviors. I would recommend that the schools should introduce more sex education studies to help in decreasing the number of teenage pregnancies.
4. The researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education should be always alert and working hand in hand with the schools to prevent the challenges reported.

5.5 Further Studies

This study explored the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba. I would therefore recommend a similar study in the secondary schools of other cities of Malawi to see if COVID-19 pandemic affected the students differently from Zomba city.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 2(1), 100051.
- Al-Maskari, A., Al-Riyami, T., & Kunjumammed, S. K. (2022). Students' academic and social concerns during COVID-19 pandemic. *Education and information technologies*, 27(1), 1-21.
- Alizadeh, H., Sharifi, A., Damanbagh, S., Nazarnia, H., & Nazarnia, M. (2023). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social sphere and lessons for crisis management: a literature review. *Natural Hazards*, 117(3), 1-26.
- Anderson, R. M., Heesterbeek, H., Klinkenberg, D., & Hollingsworth, T. D. (2020). How will country-based mitigation measures influence the course of the COVID-19 epidemic? *The Lancet*, 395(10228), 931-934.
- Arifin, S. R. M. (2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International Journal of Care Scholars*, 1(2), 30-33.
- American School Counselor Association. (2019). *ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.). <https://schoolcounselor.org/Ascanationalmodel/media/ANM-templates/ANMExecSumm.pdf>
- Barrett, D., & Twycross, A. (2018). Data collection in qualitative research. *Evidence-based Nursing*, 21(3), 63-64.
- Banda, J. (2021). *Knowledge, risk perceptions, and behaviors related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27032922>

- Bellei, C., Contreras, M., Ponce, T., Yañez, I., Díaz, R., & Vielma, C. (2022). The fragility of the school-in-pandemic in Chile. In F.M. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and Secondary Education During Covid-19* (pp. 79-103). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4_3
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2007). *The bioecological model of human development. Handbook of child psychology, 1.* <http://www.doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 3(2), 37-43.
- Cárdenas, S., Lomelí, D., & Ruelas, I. (2022). COVID-19 and post-pandemic educational policies in Mexico. What is at stake? In F.M. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and Secondary Education during Covid-19: Disruptions to Educational Opportunity during a Pandemic* (pp. 153- 175). Springer
- Chiwaula, L. W., Kadzamira, E. C., & Meke, E. S. (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 on Primary Education in Malawi: Exploring Policy Responses and Practices. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 24(2), 61-76.
- Clemente-Suárez, V. J., Martínez-González, M. B., Benitez-Agudelo, J. C., Navarro-Jiménez, E., Beltran-Velasco, A. I., Ruisoto, P., ... & Tornero-Aguilera, J. F. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental disorders. A critical review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(19), 10041.
- Costin, C., & Coutinho, A. (2022). Experiences with risk-management and remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil: Crises, destitutions, and (possible) resolutions. In F.M. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and Secondary*

Education During Covid-19: Disruptions to Educational Opportunity During a Pandemic (pp. 39-78). Springer

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011).

The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11(1), 1-9.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. SAGE.

Dang, Hai-Anh; Oseni, Gbemisola; Zezza, Alberto; Abanokova, Kseniya (2021).

Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: Evidence from Six Sub-Saharan African Countries. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35676>

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigms and perspectives in contention. In

N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 195-209). SAGE

Edge, D., Redwood, S., Jindal-Snape, D., & Crawley, E. (2024). Impact of COVID-19

pandemic on secondary school teaching staff and primary to secondary transitions. *Psychology in the Schools*, 61(1), 17-28.

Hall, E., Chai, W., & Albrecht, J. A. (2016). A qualitative phenomenological

exploration of teachers' experience with nutrition education. *American Journal of Health Education*, 47(3), 136-148.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19325037.2016.1157532> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Hamilton, L., & Gross, B. (2021). *How Has the Pandemic Affected Students' Social-*

Emotional Well-Being? A Review of the Evidence to Date. Center on Reinventing Public Education.

- Härkönen, U. (2001). *The Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory of human development*. Scientific Articles of V International Conference, pp. 1-17.
- Hatzichristou, C., Georgakakou-Koutsonikou, N., Lianos, P., Lampropoulou, A., & Yfanti, T. (2021). Assessing school community needs during the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: Teacher, parent and student perceptions. *School Psychology International*, 42(6), 590-615.
- Honebein, P. C. Wilson, Brent. G (1996). Seven goals for the design of constructivist learning environment In *Constructivist learning environments: case studies in instructional design*. Educational Technology Publications. Englewood Cliffs.
- Jackson-Cherry L. R., Erford B. T. (2018). *Crisis assessment, intervention, and prevention* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
- Jain, R., Budlender, J., Zizzamia, R., & Bassier, I. (2020). The Labor Market and Poverty Impacts of Covid-19 in South Africa. *SALDRU Working Paper No. 264*.
- Josephson, A., Kilic, T., & Michler, J. D. (2021). Socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in low-income countries. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5(5), 557-565.
- Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(11), 1632-1641.
- Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), 26-41.
- Laamanen, M., Ladonlahti, T., Uotinen, S., Okada, A., Bañeres, D., & Koçdar, S. (2021). Acceptability of the e-authentication in higher education studies:

- Views of students with special educational needs and disabilities. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 18(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00236-9>.
- Lee, D., Moy, N., Tritter, J., & Paolucci, F. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic: Global health policy and technology responses in the making. *Health Policy and Technology*, 9(4), 397-412.
- Li, Y., Liu, G., Egolet, R. O., Yang, R., Huang, Y., & Zheng, Z. (2021). Knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to COVID-19 among Malawi adults: a community-based survey. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(8), 4090.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084090>
- Li, Y., Liang, M., Gao, L., Ahmed, M. A., Uy, J. P., Cheng, C., ... & Sun, C. (2021). Face masks to prevent transmission of COVID-19: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *American Journal of Infection Control*, 49(7), 900-906.
- Munthali, G. N. C., & Xuelian, W. (2020). Covid-19 Outbreak on Malawi Perspective. *Electron J Gen Med.*, 17 (4), em210.
<https://doi.org/10.29333/ejgm/7871>
- Mzumara, G. W., Chawani, M., Sakala, M., Mwandira, L., Phiri, E., Milanzi, E., ... & Tam, P. Y. I. (2021). The health policy response to COVID-19 in Malawi. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(5), e006035.
- Noor, S., Isa, F. M., & Mazhar, F. F. (2020). Online teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 9(3), 169-184.

- Ngwacho, A. G. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic impact on Kenyan education sector: Learner challenges and mitigations. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 4(2), 128-139.
- Nyasulu, J. C. Y., Munthali, R. J., Nyondo-Mipando, A. L., Pandya, H., Nyirenda, L., Nyasulu, P. S., & Manda, S. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi: Did public sociopolitical events gatherings contribute to its first-wave local transmission? *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 106(1), 269-275.
- Nyumba, O., Wilson, T., Derrick, K., C. J., & Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 9(1), 20-32
- Pincus, R., Hannor-Walker, T., Wright, L., & Justice, J. (2020). COVID-19's effect on students: How school counselors rise to the rescue. *NASSP Bulletin*, 104(4), 241- 256.
- Putri, R. S., Purwanto, A., Asbari, M., & Wijayanti, L. M. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on online home learning: An explorative study of primary schools in Indonesia. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(5), 4809-4818.
- Poudel, P. B., Poudel, M. R., Gautam, A., Phuyal, S., Tiwari, C. K., Bashyal, N., & Bashyal, S. (2020). COVID-19 and its global impact on food and agriculture. *Journal of Biology and Today's World*, 9(5), 221-225.
- Pontuschka, R., Kan, S., & Dreesen, T. (2022). *Reopening with Resilience: Lessons from Remote Learning during COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa*. UNICEF

- Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133-141.
- Pawar, M. (2020). The global impact of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 2(2), 111-120.
- Pragholapati, A. (2020). *COVID-19 impact on students*. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
- Rai, N., & Thapa, B. (2015). *A study on purposive sampling method in research*. Kathmandu School of Law.
- Rahman, P. S., & Azmi, S. (2023). Importance of Guidance and Counselling Service in High School: A Study on opinion of Teachers and Students. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 35(1), 2910-2928.
- Reimers, F. M. (2022). Learning from a pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on education around the world. In F.M. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and secondary education during Covid-19: Disruptions to educational opportunity during a pandemic* (pp. 1-37). Springer.
- Rawat, N. S., & Choudhary, K. C. (2020). *Coping strategies with stress and anxiety of tri-pillar of the education system in COVID-19 pandemic period*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3596912>
- Rider, E. & Sigelman, C. (2009). *Lifespan development* (6th ed). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

- Sakaue, K., Ogawa, M., & Sawamura, N. (2021). Inequality in Learning Engagements Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Comparative Study of Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi. *Africa Educational Research Journal*, 12(1), 4-18.
- Saputri, E. A., Miftakh, F., & Samsi, Y. S. (2021). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in teaching and learning activity. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*, 14(2), 320-335.
- Singal, N., Mbukwa-Ngwira, J., Taneja-Johansson, S., Lynch, P., Chatha, G., & Umar, E. (2021). Impact of Covid-19 on the education of children with disabilities in Malawi: reshaping parental engagement for the future. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1(1), 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1965804>
- Spencer, M. B. (2008). *Phenomenology and ecological systems theory: Development of diverse groups*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0115>
- Szabó, R. (2019). From the digital coalface: building a range of blended English-language communicative competence courses in partnership with corporate learning and development stakeholders. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, 1(1), 19-22.
<https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2019.v1.n1.id1008.p19>
- Tadesse, S., & Muluye, W. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education System in Developing Countries: A Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.810011>.
- Tengatenga, J., Tengatenga Duley, S. M., & Tengatenga, C. J. (2021). Zimitsani moto: understanding the Malawi COVID-19 response. *Laws*, 10(2), 20-5.

- Usmanovna, N. G., & Oybekovna, D. G. (2018). The importance of motivation in education. *Достижения науки и образования*, (16 (38)), 33-35.
- Woods, J. A., Hutchinson, N.T., Powers, S. K., Roberts, W. O., Gomez-Cabrera, M.C., Radak, Z., Berkes, I., Boros, A., Boldogh, I., Leeuwenburgh, C., Coelho-Júnior, H.J., Marzetti, E., Cheng, Y., Liu, J., Durstine, J.L., Sun, J., Ji, L.L (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and physical activity. *Sports Medicine and Health Science*, 2(2), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smhs.2020.05.006>.
- World Health Organization. (2020, March 22) .*Critical preparedness, readiness and response actions for COVID-19: interim guidance*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331511>. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO
- World Health Organization. (2020). COVID-19 strategic preparedness and response plan: strengthening the collective response and accelerating readiness in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. *WHO-EM/CSR/291/E*).
- Young, B. N. (1994). Qualitative Research Comes of Age. *Online Submission*, 21(1), 21-23.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview guide with Head teachers

Title of study: Experiences of Secondary School Students in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Period: Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Zomba

Purpose of study: Exploring the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba.

Instructions: Please answer the questions, whenever you don't understand ask me to clarify more. The Researcher is obligated to respect your privacy and your views presented are confidential. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Section A: Bio-Data

School

Gender

Position

Teaching experience

Period at current position

Section B: What social aspects of the students' lives did the COVID-19 pandemic affect?

1. What kind of social interactions did the students have before the pandemic?
2. Explain the changes in the social interactions when the COVID-19 pandemic came?
3. In what ways did online learning affect the students' social aspects of life?
4. How did the students cope with school without face to face interactions?

5. What help did you render to the socialisation of the students in the pandemic period?

Section C: How the pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools

1. In what ways did the pandemic affect the mental health of students?
2. What challenges did you face in the course of helping the mental health of the students?
3. Who did you work with in helping the students' mental health?
4. What mental changes were commonly noticed in the students?
5. What measures did you initiate in your school to help the students' mental health?

Section D: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in schools?

1. How has the pandemic affected teaching and learning in your school?
2. What are the challenges you have experienced in terms of delivery of instruction?
3. What was the mode of learning that was mainly used during the COVID-19 pandemic at this school?
4. In your opinion, were the teaching and learning modes effective?
5. Give reasons for the answers in the above questions.

6. How did most students react to the change in the teaching and learning instruction?

Section E: How have schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID- 19 pandemic?

1. What policies did your school use during the COVID-19 pandemic in order for the students to cope?
2. How did the school support its students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - i. Emotionally
 - ii. Psychologically
 - iii. Physically
3. How effective were the strategies being used?
4. What challenges did the schools meet in the process of supporting the students?
5. What was the response from the parents and caretakers of the students?
6. What role did your teachers play in helping you go through the pandemic?
7. What other stakeholders took the initiative to help the schools in supporting the students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Appendix B: Interview guide with Teachers

Title of study: Experiences of Secondary School Students in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Period: Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Zomba

Purpose of study: Exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in selected secondary schools in Zomba.

Instructions: Please answer the questions correctly.

Section A: Bio-Data

School:

Gender:

Position

Teaching experience Period at current position

Section B: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of instruction in schools?

1. What do you know about the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How has the pandemic affected teaching and learning in your classes?
3. What are the challenges you have experienced during teaching?

4. What are the measures that you used in your classrooms to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. For how long did you use the measures?
6. Are the measures still in use?
7. What was the mode of learning that was mainly used during the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. In your opinion, were the teaching and learning modes effective?
9. Give reasons for the answers in the above questions.
10. How did most students react to the change in the teaching and learning instruction?
11. Compare the workload that was available during the pandemic versus before the pandemic?

Section C: How the pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools?

1. In what ways did the pandemic affect the mental health of students?
2. What measures did you initiate in your class to help the students' mental health?
3. What challenges did you face in the course of helping the students?

4. Differentiate the mental health of students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. Who did you work with in helping the students' mental health?

Appendix C: Interview guide with School Counsellors

- Title of study: Experiences of Secondary School Students in the COVID-19 Pandemic Period: Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Zomba
- Purpose of study: Exploring the experiences of secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected secondary schools in Zomba.
- Instructions: Please answer the questions correctly.

Section A: Bio-Data

School Gender Position

Teaching experience Period at current position

Section B: What social aspects of the students' lives did the COVID-19 pandemic affect?

1. What kind of social interactions did the students have before the pandemic?
2. Explain the changes in the social interactions when the COVID-19 pandemic came?
3. In what ways did online learning affect the students' social aspects of life?
4. How did the students cope with school without face to face interactions?
5. What help did you render to the socialisation of the students in the pandemic period?

Section C: How the pandemic affected the mental health of students in schools?

1. In what ways did the pandemic affect the mental health of students?
2. What measures did you initiate in different classes to help the students' mental health?
3. What challenges did you face in the course of helping the students?
4. Differentiate the mental health of students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. Who did you work with in helping the students' mental health?

Section D: How have schools supported students cope with the effects of COVID- 19 pandemic?

1. What role did you play in supporting the students? (individually)
2. Who did you engage with in the process of helping students?
3. How did your office facilitate procedures to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. How effective were the strategies being used?
5. What do you think should be done in order for the schools to be ready before facing pandemics?
6. How many students were mentally affected?
7. What challenges did you encounter in the process of supporting the students?

8. How did you overcome the challenges?
9. Which stakeholders helped your office in helping students cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Appendix D: FGD Guide

My name is I welcome you to this group discussion in which I am Exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in selected secondary schools in Zomba. I will be asking questions surrounding the topic. Feel free to ask where you don't understand and I will clarify accordingly. Your privacy will be kept therefore contributing your ideas is of help.

Demographics

Age:

Gender:

Education level:

1. What do you know about the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did you feel when the pandemic started?
3. Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect you mentally?
4. What methods did you use to cope up after experiencing those emotions? 5.
Were you helped by anyone to cope up with the situation?
6. What social aspects of your lives did the COVID-19 pandemic affect?

7. What social activities were you engaging in before the pandemic?
8. How many times were you meeting?
9. What changes happened after the COVID-19 pandemic came?
10. What challenges did you face during the pandemic?
11. What measures did you follow in order for the activities to continue?
12. Did the social activities continue after the pandemic?
 - i. How?

Number of Members Activities engaged Frequency of Meetings

Changes after the COVID-19 pandemic Challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

Measures alluded

Stakeholders engaged

Group functioning after the COVID-19 pandemic

Appendix E: Letter of Introduction

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

31 st October, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Letter of Introduction: Ms Jireh Manda

This letter serves to confirm that Ms Jireh Manda is a registered postgraduate student in the Education Foundations Department, of the School of Education, in the University of Malawi. She is studying under the Master of Education (Educational Psychology) program. Her registration Number is MED/PSY/02/21.

Ms. Manda has completed her coursework. As a requirement for completion of her study program, she is conducting a research titled: "Experiences of Secondary School Students in the COVID 19 Pandemic Period: Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Zomba". This letter therefore, serves to request your institution to assist our student to collect the required data.

For any inquiries please contact the undersigned via the following email address:
med@cc.ac.mw

Sincerely yours, Symon Winiko, PhD.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT - EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form Research purpose and procedures:

The primary goal of the study is to discuss the social aspects and mental health of students' lives affected by the pandemic; discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic affected delivery of instruction and how the schools supported students cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. You will be expected to respond to a few questions concerning social aspects and mental health problems of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood of students.

Risks and discomforts of the research study The research complies with the ethical requirements of University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC).

The researcher will ensure that: 1) you have the right to know the benefits and risks of your participation in this research study; 2) you have the right to withdraw from participating in this research study without any penalty for your voluntary withdrawal

It is expected that findings from this study will help different stakeholders in the education sector to incorporate strategies that will help the head teachers, school counselors and students to use in challenging times like during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Provisions for confidentiality:

Information provided will be held in confidence and no personally identifiable information about you will be disclosed to other parties to ensure your privacy.

Research related injury:

Participation in the research is voluntary, and therefore there is no compensation for participating in the study.

Voluntariness in participation and the right to discontinue participation without penalty: The Participants have the right to withdraw from participating in this research study without any penalty. The researcher has pledged to ensure that the data obtained in this research is used for stated purposes only and that no personally identifiable information will be shared with any third parties.

Should you have any questions pertaining to this study you are free to seek further clarification from:

Jireh Manda : 0880863248 /jirehmanda@yahoo.com

UNIMAREC Chairperson contact details: Dr Victoria Ndolo, Chairperson of University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC), P.O. Box 280, Zomba. +265 995 0427 60

Do you agree to continue with the study? ☐ YES ☐

NO

Name of the respondent:

I hereby consent to participate in a study titled ‘Experiences of Secondary School Students in the COVID-19 Pandemic Period’ being conducted by Jireh Manda

Having read the research expectations, I do hereby understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw from participating in this research study without any penalty for my voluntary withdrawal
- I have the right to know the benefits and risks of my participation in this research study
- My participation is voluntary, and therefore there is no compensation for participating in the study
- I, or the community from which I come, have the right to feedback from this research project.

Age: Male/Female Signature:

Date:

Contacts Email: Telephone:

Name of the interviewer: Signature:

Date:

THANK YOU

FOMU YOVOMEREZA

Cholinga cha kafukufuku yi ndi chakuti tikambirane mmene matenda a Covid 19 anakhudzira kachezedwe ndi ena komanso kaganizidwe ka ana a sukulu a sekondale; komanso mmene matenda a Covid 19 anakhudzira kaphunzitsidwe ka maphunziro; komanso njira zimene ma sukulu amagwiritsa ntchito pothandizira ophunzira ake kuti maphunziro adzipitilira popanda vuto munyengo ya matenda a Covid 19. Mukuyembekezedwa kuti muyankhe mafunso angapo okhudzana ndi mutu umenewu. Mutu wa phunziro la kafukufuku: Zochitika zimene ophunzira a m'ma sekondale anakhudziwa nazo mnyengo ya Covid 19 mu boma la Zomba.

Opanga Kafukufuku: Jireh Manda

Mukuitanidwa kuti mutenge nawo mbali pa kafukufuku amene cholinga chake ndikudziwa Zochitika zimene ophunzira a m'ma sekondale sukulu anakhudziwa nazo mnyengo ya Covid 19 mu boma la Zomba. Kutenga nawo mbali kwanu pa kafukufukuyi kukhudza kuyankhana mafunso komanso zoyankhulana.

Kafukufukuyi akutsatira ndondomeko zoyenera kutsatiridwa kuchokera ku komiti ya University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC). Tionesetsa kuti kuopsa kotenga nawo mbali pa Kafukufukuyi ndi kochepe. Kuonjezera pamenepo (a). Muli ndi ufulu kudziwa ubwino komanso mavuto amene angakhalepo pakutengapo mbali pa Kafukufukuyi (b). Muli ndi ufulu woleka kupitiliza mu Kafukufukuyi ngati mukufuna.

Ndisunga chinsinsi chanu posapereka chidziwitso chilichonse kuchokera mu kafukufukuyi kwa munthu wapadera. Sindidzaulula zidziwitso zilizonse zamunthu pa zofalitsa zilizonse zochokera mu kafukufukuyi. Kutenga nawo mbali mu kafukufukuyi ndi modzifunira nokha ndipo mukhoza kuletsa kutenga nawo mbali

Ngati muli ndi mafunso kapena nkawa pa kafukufukuyi, chonde musazengereze kulankhulana ndi Jireh Manda : 0880863248 /jirehmanda@yahoo.com.

Mutha kulankhulananso ndi wapampando wa komiti ya UNIMAREC:

Dr Victoria Ndolo, Chairperson of University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC), P.O. Box 280, Zomba. +265 995 0427 60

Ndawerenga ndi kumvesetsa zomwe ziri pamwambazi ndipo ndikuvomereza kutenga nawo mbali mu Kafukufukuyi

Mukuvomereza kutenga nawo mbali mu Kafukufukuyi: ☐ EYA

☐ AYI

Dzina:

Zaka

Mwamuna/Mkazi Signature:

Tsiku lotenga mbali pa Kafukufuku yi Mbiri ya woyankha mafunso

Email:

Telephone:

Dzina la ochititsa Kafukufuku yi Signature:

Date:

Ine ndikuvomereza kutenga nawo mbali mu Kafukufuku amene mutu wake ndi
“Zochitika zimene ophunzira a m’ma sekondale anakhudzidwa nazo mnyengo ya
Covid 19 mu boma la Zomba”.

Ndawerenga ndi kumvesetsa zofunikira mu Kafukufuku yi kuti

- Ndiri ndi ufulu kudziwa ubwino komanso ziopsezo zimene zingabwere kamba
kotenga nawo mbali mu kafukufukuyi.
- Ndiri ndi ufulu wotha kuletsa kutenga nawo mbali
- Kutenga nawo mbali mu kafukufukuyi ndi modzifunira ndekha