

**INVESTIGATING SCHOOL -RELATED FACTORS AFFECTING GIRLS DROP
OUT RATES IN SENIOR CLASSES AT PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL:
*A CASE STUDY OF MACHINGA RURAL***

MASTER OF EDUCATION (POLICY PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP) THESIS

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UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

MAY, 2023



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DECLARATION

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

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 our approval.

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Supervisor

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband Chikaiko Cheyo and to my lovely daughters
Favour and Chimwemwe Cheyo.

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ABSTRACT

Girls' dropout in primary school continues to be one of the major problems experienced in education system. This study sought to investigate school -related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level in Machinga rural. The study examined two rural schools in the district. A qualitative design, which falls under the interpretivist paradigm was used. Participants from two primary schools in Machinga rural and the surrounding communities were purposively sampled. Questionnaires were administered to school heads to provide information about the schools' profile. Focus group discussions were conducted with teachers, learners, SMC, parents and dropouts to collect data to allow the researcher a platform to ask open-response questions and to explore the participants' perspectives about the causes of learner dropout. The data obtained from the focus group discussions was analyzed thematically by carefully identifying and describing significant themes that emerged from participants' responses to interview questions. The study revealed that repeating a class, which in turn make the girls look too old for the class, giving girls negative and demeaning comments when they fail in class and lack of female teachers in senior classes in whom girls can confide in, among others, were some of the school related factors influencing school dropout. Therefore, teachers, the learning environment as well as the school rules and practices were found to contribute to girls' dropout. The recommendations of this study were that policies that prohibit learners from repeating a class more than once should be implemented, teachers should be encouraged to use positive and encouraging comments, and female teachers should be allocated to both junior and senior classes.

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ACRONYMS

UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
EMIS	: Education Management Information System
FPE	: Free Primary Education
NSO	: National Statistics Office
SMC	: School Management Committee
FDG	: Focus Group Discussions
GABLE	: Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education
UNICEF	: United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	: United Nations Development Program
WFP	: World Food Programme
UNFPA	: United Nations Population Fund

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the chapter

This study sought to investigate school -related factors affecting girls 'dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level. This chapter discusses the background to the study, thus, the context and the setting of the problem from both local and global perspective. It also provides the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. Furthermore, it provides the questions the research is trying to answer and it also states the significance of carrying out the study.

1.2 Background to the study

1.2.1 Local perspective on girls' school dropout

Girl drop out in primary school has been a perennial problem over the years. Prior to the introduction of Free Primary Education, half of the school-age children in Malawi were not attending school and the majority of these were girls. At the beginning of the 1990s decade the majority of children enrolled in school were boys while girls comprised less than half the enrolment – 45% in 1990. The proportion of girls steadily increased over the years with remarkable progress seen in the period when girls' education became a focus of government policy from 1991 with the launching of the GABLE. During this period the proportion of girls increased to 48% of the primary school enrolments in 1993/94. Girls 'enrolment picked up again after the fall

out from FPE has eased and by 2005 nearly half of the primary school enrollments were girls (Kadzamila and Rose, 2003).

Though Malawi has made great strides in increasing access of children especially girls to school, these have resulted in negligible improvements in completion rates. Widespread gender disparities manifest at upper levels of primary. Female students drop out at higher rates and complete school at lower rates than their male counterparts. Girls from rural and poor households face the greatest barriers to school access and retention. Primary school completion among rural students is 34 percentage points lower than those of urban students (Samati, 2013).

Similar studies were carried out in Malawi by Chimombo et al., Naunje (2004), Maluwa (2010) and Kapute et al (2014) to find out factors causing school dropout. Poverty, lack of parental encouragement, early pregnancies, lack of interest of the child, prostitution, marriages, family jobs, employment, teachers' handling of pupils, harsh punishments, long distance, poor facilities and violence were found to be the factors causing drop out. However, the current study remained necessary because unlike these other studies, this one focused on senior classes, thus, standard 5, 6, 7 and 8 where school dropout rates are usually high.

1.2.2 Global perspective on girls' school drop out

According to UNESCO report (2012), Sub Saharan Africa had the highest female drop-out rate in primary education of all world regions in 2012, of 42%. South and West Asia had the second highest rate of 34 percent, followed by Latin America and

the Caribbean at 21 percent. In East Asia and the Pacific, the female drop-out rate was 6.7 percent.

In Latin America the situation is attributed by the low socio-economic status of the parents that makes children more likely to drop out of school (Khamsini, 2010). Adelman and Székely (2016) reported teenage pregnancy, early marriage, crime and violence as causes of the high dropout rate. Teenage pregnancy rates are particularly high in Central America, and teen mothers may find it impossible to continue in school, due to lack of needed supports such as daycare, while other young women may decide that it is preferable to leave school and start a family early. Similarly, crime and violence are major problems in several Central American countries. Violence in and around a school may make it untenable for youth to continue attending (Adelman and Székely, 2016).

A study conducted in rural Bangladesh indicated that although primary school enrollment had reached 98 percent for girls; there is only a small completion rate. It is estimated that 45 percent of children dropout before completing level 5 and only 51 percent of girls' progress from primary to secondary education (Shahidul, 2015). A number of factors were found to be influencing girls drop out at primary school level. Poverty was the number one answer respondents gave during Yancy (2015)'s study to explain the situation for girl dropouts, followed by forced marriages. Studies in the past have shown that families with low-income are less likely to have more years of schooling than those who grew up in families with higher income.

On the other hand, in Sub Sahara the main reasons attributed to increased number of dropouts included increased extreme poverty, low participation due to long distance

from school, rural life, and disability and war effects such as displacement of family members, marginalization of the minorities, rampant disease effect especially Human Immune Virus Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). Other reasons mentioned for dropout of children include early marriages, pregnancy and sickness especially among girls (Sabates et al, 2010).

School factors were also found to provide a good indication of the many ways in which schools limit girls' academic potential in Sub-Sahara. Through exclusion, avoidance and marginalization, schools reflect and promote society's low expectations of girls. Teachers hold negative attitudes about the academic potential of female students and project the wider communities' gender biases into classrooms. School cultures are generally hostile to girls, and sexual harassment and violence within educational institutions create an uncomfortable milieu for learning. The negative images of women in textbooks and other learning materials further reinforce society's view of women. This situation is exacerbated by the poor conditions in schools and low teacher morale (Sabates et al, 2010)

In Kenya, the Economic Survey (2011), show that Kenya's more than 400,000 pupils who enrolled in school under free primary education program did not complete standard eight. They were forced to drop out or repeat and only 59 percent of them completed. A greater percentage of the dropouts were girls. This caused concern on the high level of wastage in the education system dropout. Likewise, out of all the girls who enroll in standard one in Kenya's Garissa district only 34 percent complete standard eight as compared to 70 percent of boys. In Kenya the situation is not different from other.

African countries where the high rate of pupils' dropout has been ascribed mainly to more or less similar socioeconomic situations including family social backgrounds, the negative attitude of parents toward schooling, parent's ignorance, and lack of interest in education, early marriages, unaffordable school fees, migration and poor academic performance.

1.2.3 Malawi's education policies in relation to girls' education

It is also worth noting that the government of Malawi has over the past two decades demonstrated an increasingly strong commitment to expanding equitable access to education for all children and youth in Malawi. This has included the adoption of a range of policies and measures specifically to address the many challenges the girl child faces (Maluwa-Banda, 2003).

The first policy was the introduction of FPE which eliminated school fees for all children at primary education level (Kadzamira & Pauline, 2001, Maluwa-Banda, 2003). The public response to the initiative was both overwhelming and unprecedented: an additional 1 million children entered school, an overall increase of over 50 percent from the previous year.

The other policy was abolishing requirements for school uniform which stipulated that uniform, was not a requirement for attendance at primary school level (Maluwa-Banda, 2003) and children should not be sent away from school for not wearing one. In line with this policy, it was stated that pupils should not be forced to wear any form of uniform but should be advised to put on simple and neat clothing.

Readmission policy was another policy and it allows teen mothers who were drawn from school due to pregnancy to resume studies after giving birth, thereby; reversing the prior policy that permanently banned such students from enrolling. The policy provides that a school girl who falls pregnant should immediately be withdrawn from school for one academic year and be readmitted upon application as long as there is an assurance of safe custody of the child after delivery (Samati, 2010).

Repetition policy was another policy adopted in favor of a girl child's education. The rationale for introducing new repetition policy was based on the premise that if repetition rates were reduced girls would rapidly move through the system and they would be able to complete their education before the onset of puberty when societal pressures for them to get married and have children are great (Samati, 2010)

However, it is worth noting that despite all these policies which were formulated and implemented in favor of the girls' education, the problem of girls drop out in primary schools continued. Therefore, there is a need to conduct research to investigate the school related factors which are influencing girls to drop out despite all these policies which are in their favor.

1.3 Statement of the problem

It is evident that despite national commitment to provide basic education to all children through FPE and other initiatives, Malawi's girl's education is still lagging behind. Overall enrollment rates for both boys and girls have been rising due to FPE introduced in 1994, which rose from 1.89 million in 1993/4 to 4.49 million in 2013 (Education statistics, 2013 bulletin). However, the rate at which girls drop out of school before reaching the last grade of primary education is high. Dropout rates

remain similar by gender until upper primary and disparities emerge as early as standard 4 with girls dropping out and repeating to a much greater extent than boys (Joint UN-UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and UNDP, 2015). Data from the NSO (2012) revealed that 58% of girls drop out of school and out of those remaining in school, 18% became pregnant and 8% married (NSO, 2012).

According to EMIS (2016), Machinga district in the Malawi's southern region is one of the districts with the highest dropout rates. It is the second district in the southern region with the highest dropout rate, with a proportion of 6.7 percent. Similarly, it is the second district in Malawi with the highest girls' dropout rate, with a proportion of 7.1 percent. The question is 'what might be the reasons behind these high dropout rates among girls'?

Therefore, this study will find out school related factors influencing girls' school dropout.

In this study, the term school related factors refer to what happens in the school.

Various studies have been carried out on the factors that lead to school dropout. The studies include those by Naunje (2004), Maluwa (2010) and Mzuza et al (2014), which focused on Malawi's magnitude and causes of dropout; classroom, school and home factors that negatively affect girls education; and analyzing the factors causing poor passing rates and high dropout rates among primary school girls in Malawi respectively. The studies found poverty, lack of parental encouragement, early pregnancies, lack of interest of the child, prostitution, marriages, family jobs, employment and sickness as some of the factors causing dropout rates whereas

teacher's handling of pupils, harsh punishments, long distance, poor facilities and violence were found to be classroom and school related factors causing drop out.

Studies done somewhere include those by Abdullah (2012) who researched on factors affecting girls 'participation in primary education in Kenya 's Garissa district, Shahidul (2015)'s multidimensionality of schoolgirl dropouts in rural Bangladesh, and Yancey (2015) who researched on barriers to girls' education in Ghana. The findings of such studies were similar to those found in Malawi and include schooling costs, parental involvement household chores, lack of female teachers, lack of feminine facilities, school distance, early marriage, pregnancy, harassment by males, gender stereotyping and unattractive school environment.

Most of these studies focused on factors affecting girls' dropout in general and very few focused on school related factors. In addition, out of those previous studies which focused on school related factors the focus on school related factors in general while the current study particularly focused on senior classes of primary school, thus standard 6, 7 and 8, where cases of dropouts are usually high. This study therefore sought to investigate school related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level in Machinga district.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate school -related factors affecting girls 'dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level.

1.5 Main research question

The main research question of the study is 'Why do girls, particularly in senior classes, drop out of primary schools before completing the primary school cycle?

1.6 Specific research questions

The main research problem is divided into the following specific questions:

1. What school related factors contribute to girls' school dropout?
2. Which factors are more influential in determining girls drop out?
3. What can be done to mitigate against girls' dropout levels at school level?

1.7 Significance of the study

This study will provide useful information as to why most female students do not make it up to the last grade in primary school and especially on how schools contribute to this. Further, this study will help policy makers to come up with policies that will help make schools a conducive learning environment for girls so that they can pursue their education freely without any hindrance. Furthermore, this study will guide teachers and other education practitioners in the way they should handle students considering the fact that they may also contribute to girls' dropout in one way or the other, for example through having negative attitudes toward a girl learner.

1.8 Definition of terms

Dropout: A dropout is defined as any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a programme of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school (Bonneau, 2008). In this study, a dropout is a girl learner who leaves primary school without completing a primary school cycle.

Dropout rate: The dropout rate was defined and calculated as the percentage of students who dropped out during the school year compared to all students who had been enrolled during the school year

School-related factors: School-related factors refer to conditions that are connected to school that can either deter or enhance the involvement of pupils in primary education

Enrollment rate: Total number of students of primary school age group who are enrolled at primary expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.

Senior classes: This refers to the upper classes of the primary school, thus, standards 5, 6, 7 and 8.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study. Various studies in various countries have been conducted to investigate school related factors causing girls' dropout. The literature reviewed include the studies on hindrances to girls' education, policies related to girls' education, girls' experience in school, global and local perspective of girls' education, and school related factors causing dropout. This section, therefore, seeks to bring forth what has been reported by these studies.

2.2 Hindrances to girls' education

Hindrances to girls' education are complex and multifaceted. In addition to unfavorable school environments, they can include discriminatory social and cultural factors, poverty, early marriage and school related violence.

2.2.1 Early marriages

Early marriage is one of the key factors that keep girls out of school. A study conducted by Kipkulei et al, (2012) on selected factors affecting girls' participation in primary school education in Kenya revealed that early marriage denies a girl-child the opportunity to attend school. The study further revealed that in some rural Arid and Semi-arid areas of Kenya, parents still arrange some marriages for their children. When this is done, it is usual for the girl-child as young as 12 years to quit school. A study conducted by Zombwe et al (2010) in Tanzania found that when a girl child reaches

puberty, she is forced to stop school so as to get married. A study conducted by UNICEF (2011) revealed that one in three girls in low- and middle-income countries continue to be married before the age of 18 and one in nine girls are married before their 15th birthday. While countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are concentrated in Western and sub-Saharan Africa due to population size, the largest number of child brides reside in South Asia.

2.2.2 School related violence

In addition, pervasive school-related violence harms millions of girls and young women and therefore prevents girls from continuing with their education (UNESCO, 2011). This violence ranges from extreme acts such as kidnapping, bombing, maiming, and killing—acts which often occur in contexts of armed conflict, militancy, and political violence and in 15 countries around the world are directly targeted at girls. But it also includes the often invisible but pervasive practices of sexual abuse, exploitation, and bullying.

2.2.3 Cost of education

The cost of education also influences school dropout. Direct and indirect schooling costs are important factors for the education of children and schooling costs especially school fees, are a central reason for early dropout from schools (Karim and Shahidul, 2015). Study conducted by Chinyoka (2014) on causes of learner dropout found that the participants revealed that poverty was the major cause of school drop-out. Much as most countries do not charge tuition fees in primary education, and that some countries have eliminated such fees even at the lower secondary level, nonetheless, there are other direct costs that can discourage school attendance. Studies have

identified other school related costs which parents have to incur, costs like clothing, money to buy school supplies and money for transport among other things.

Karim and Shahidul (2015) reported that schooling costs are sometimes linked to the gender of the children as parents are sometimes become unwilling to pay schooling fees for their daughters. The total cost of school enrollment for girls may be large enough to result in school dropout. UNICEF (2012) reported that many Nigerian parents, especially in large families with limited resources, enroll their boys in school rather than girls. UNICEF (2006) found that almost 70 per cent of the Nigerian population living below the poverty line and girls are often sent to work in the markets or hawk wares on the streets.

2.3 Policies on girls' education

Many countries have put in place gender sensitive policies with the aim of promoting girls' education. Malawi also adopted some policies which are in favor of girls' education.

This chapter seeks to explain those policies in detail.

2.3.1 School fee abolition policy

Since low educational attainment in the developing world can be attributed in part to the private costs associated with sending children to public school, Malawi government introduced school fee abolition policy among other factors to increase access to primary education and to eliminate inequalities in enrollment (Maluwa-Banda, 2003). The policy resulted in a large number of children entering school.

2.3.2 School uniform abolition policy

Abolishing requirements for school uniform was another policy adopted in Malawi. Several research studies conducted before had shown girls uniforms to be more expensive than boys, especially considering the social economic status of most Malawian households. The prevailing practice was to send back home children not wearing uniform. For this reason, the government issued a policy on school uniform, which stipulated that uniform, was not a requirement for attendance and children should not be sent away from school for not wearing one. In line with this policy, it was stated that pupils should not be forced to wear any form of uniform but should be advised to put on simple and neat clothing (Samati, 2010).

2.3.3 School readmission policy

The school readmission policy allows teen mothers who were drawn from school due to pregnancy to resume studies after giving birth, thereby; reversing the prior policy that permanently banned such students from enrolling. The policy provides that a school girl who falls pregnant should immediately be withdrawn from school for one academic year and be readmitted upon application as long as there is an assurance of safe custody of the child after delivery. This chance is given only once in a girl 's school cycle (Samati, 2010).

2.3.4 Repetition policy

Repetition policy was another policy adopted in favor of a girl child 's education. The rationale for introducing new repetition policy was based on the premise that if repetition rates were reduced girls would rapidly move through the system and they

would be able to complete their education before the onset of puberty when societal pressures for them to get married and have children are great (Kadzamila and Rose, 2003; Samati, 2010).

2.3.5 The school entry age policy

In order to enhance the possibility of girls staying longer in school and completing their primary education GABLE set new targets for entry age so as to tackle the problem of late entry into school which was then very common especially among rural children. The policy set the minimum and maximum, age of entry into school to be 6 and 12 years. The policy had the potential of easing some of the problems faced in lower primary such as overcrowding that were believed to be contributing to the inefficiencies of the system as well as creating safer environments for girls by removing the threat posed by older boys in class (Kadzamila and Rose, 2003). Despite all these policies in favor of girls' education, dropout rates still remain high.

2.4 Global and local perspective of school dropout

Education system continues to face a number of challenges. While access to education has been improving globally, there has been little progress in reducing the rate at which children leave school before reaching the last grade of primary education. About 137 million children began primary school in 2011, but at least 34 million children left school before reaching the last grade of primary education (UNESCO, 2013).

The UNESCO (2012) report indicates that by 2012 Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest female drop-out rate in primary education of all world regions, of 42%. South and West Asia had the second highest rate of 34 percent, followed by Latin America

and the Caribbean at 21 percent. In East Asia and the Pacific the female drop-out rate was 6.7 percent.

Among developing and South Asian countries, Pakistan still remains a country with a significant number of dropout rates. The dropout rate for girls is 56 percent and it is 44 percent for boys. In rural Bangladesh, 45 percent of children dropout before completing level 5 and only 51 percent of girls progress from primary to secondary education (Shahidul, 2015). Similarly, in Kenya, more than 400,000 pupils who enrolled in school under free primary education program did not complete standard eight. They were forced to drop out or repeat and only 59 percent of the completed. In Malawi, primary school completion is also low especially among rural students, where the school completion rate is 34 percentage points lower than those of urban students.

2.5 The extent of girls' dropout

It is reported that Malawi has one of the highest school dropout rates in southern Africa. Many girls drop out of school before reaching Standard 8 which is the final class in primary schools in Malawi hence high dropout rates in girls than boys dropping out between Grades 5 and 8 of primary school (Education Statistics, 2010). From 78.5% of girls who enrolled into primary education in Malawi after introduction of the free primary education compared to boys (77%), not many of them attended classes normally (40% versus 47% for boys) and also many girls dropped out (Mzuza, et al 2014).

According to EMIS (2016), Machinga district in the Malawi's southern region is one of the districts with the highest dropout rates. It is the second district in the southern

region with the highest dropout rate, with a proportion of 6.7 percent. Similarly, it is the second district in Malawi with the highest girls' dropout rate, with a proportion of 7.1 percent

2.6 School related factors influencing girls drop out

As Karim and Shadul (2016) observes, when dropout rate varies by gender and if girls tend to drop out earlier compared to boys, it manifests that there are some unique factors contributing to the increase in the dropout rate, particularly for girls.

2.6.1 Long distance to school

Long distance to schools in primary school-age children can hinder one's opportunity to learn. Studies conducted by Mzuza et al 2013; Mpuwaliywa and Mconel, 2016; Priyadarshini et al 2015 and EMIS, 2014 found that long distances is one of the factors that causes school dropout. The study findings revealed that in cases where learners have to travel long distances to school it has been associated with cases of increased dropout whereas short distances from homes to schools have been associated with reduced dropout cases. As reported by Mpuwaliywa and Mconel, 2016, although long distances from schools affects both boys and girls, on the other hand, the girls are the ones who are mostly affected. This is because girls are prone to cases of rape and sexual harassment along the way.

Karim and Shadul (2016) reported that in African regions school distance can discourage girls from being educated for two major problems. One of them is the length of time and energy needed to cover the distance for children with empty stomachs. Another is parental anxiety about sexual safeguard of their daughters.

UNICEF (2012) reports that schools are remotely located and noted that in most cases where learners have to travel for long distances to school, the roads are not safe enough for the learners. It was also found that where learners have to travel for long distances to school in some cases they face a lot of danger on their way. Study findings by Yancey (2015) show that where learners have to travel for long distances, they are exposed to a number of dangers on their way as Juma (2011) found that sometimes girls are raped on their way to and from schools. As Bradshaw et al (2012) observed the problem of long distances from schools is usually experienced in rural settings as compared to urban settings. They add to say that despite the long distances which they have to travel, there are no other means of transport apart from walking.

Many of these barriers apply to both boys and girls, but they are often worse for girls, for example, households that are a long distance away from the nearest school are often more willing to allow a boy to travel the distance unaccompanied than to allow a girl to do the same (HEART, 2015). In some contexts, (e.g. Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia) the negative impact of increased distance to school on attendance is similar for boys and girls. In other contexts, (e.g. Malawi, Ghana, Afghanistan and Pakistan) girls' participation rates are more sensitive to distance than boys'. This may be because parents are less willing to allow girls to travel unaccompanied compared to boys (GPE, 2013).

2.6.2 School facilities

School facilities, for instance, toilets, libraries have also been found to influence girl learners' retention in schools. Schools where facilities are inadequate have experienced high dropout rates. However, studies conducted in several parts of the

world have found that most schools do not have enough of these facilities. A study conducted by Khan et al (2011) found lack of enough toilets to be a contributing factor towards girls drop out in schools in Pakistan. Studies conducted in Malawi by Mzuza et al (2014) and Chimombo et al (2000) also found similar results as they found that lack of enough toilets for girls caused a lot of school dropouts. The studies found that lack of facilities like girls toilets cause discomfort among girls because, unlike boys, girls need more time and privacy. As a result, girls may get discouraged with the situation at the school and decide to remain home where they are more comfortable especially during menstruation periods.

On the other hand, studies have shown that where schools have enough facilities cases of school dropouts decrease. A study by Khamsin (2010) found that head teachers reported that the number of school dropouts went down due to the improved environment through the provision of funds to schools to build new toilets and rehabilitate dilapidated ones. These improvements attracted pupils to remain in schools.

2.6.3 Harassment

Harassment of girls is one issue that was reported to be one of the causes of school dropout in many studies (Naunje, 2004; Mzuza et al, 2014). The harassment of girls takes forms of verbal abuse about girls' physical appearance and physical abuse such as bullying and touching various parts. In some cases, main perpetrators of harassment of girls were boys although male teachers were also mentioned in some sites as perpetrators of harassment of girls. This was particularly true in schools

whose classes had gone beyond standard 4. Munthali (2010) also reported that male teachers do ask girls for sexual relationships.

Harassment of girls has a negative impact on their schooling. For instance, some girls are not free in class and in the school because they are apprehensive of the behavior of the boys. This makes them assume a subordinate status, which leads to poor participation in class. There are some girls who absent themselves from school because they are scared of the boys. Girls reach the extent of dropping out either because they are scared of boys and teachers (UNRWA, 2013).

2.6.4 Lack of role models

Research study results have also proved that if girl learners have no female teachers in their schools to look up to as role models it can have an impact on their schooling. If majority of the teachers in the school are male and when the school has no female teacher at all, the situation gives a bad impression to the girls since female teachers act as immediate role models for them (Chinyoka, 2014). The presence of fewer female teachers could therefore perpetuate the societal belief that boys are intelligent and usually continue with school unlike the girls. In addition, if the school has no female teachers, girls find it difficult because they have no one to share their issues with, as they are not comfortable to confide in male teachers (Amadi et al., 2013; Chinyoka, 2014).

Several studies have also found that teaching methodologies are equally important in determining girls' dropout. Kipkemboi and Korir (2014) recommends that teachers must use appropriate and effective instructional methods so that students can easily transfer what is taught in school and apply it to solve problems in real life. To support

this, studies conducted by Amadi et.al (2013) in selected schools found that teaching methods did not cause school dropout. This finding may be due to the introduction of in-service training of teacher on the appropriate teaching methods that are learner centered and not gender biased. This implied that new approaches of teaching have been implemented in those schools.

2.6.5 Teaching methods

On the other hand, Ochuodho (2013) in his study found that most teachers use one or two teaching methods and those teachers do not make any effort to stimulate learning, making classroom experiences dull and monotonous. These finding agrees with that from that of Sabates et al (2010) on a study f effect of primary school quality on school dropout among Kenyan girls and boys, which revealed that school factors like passive instructional strategies, disregarding the pupils learning style influenced the girls' decisions to withdraw from school. It was also observed that in some cases questions are gender biased, in most cases favoring boys. Khan et al (2011) reported that most teachers hold negative attitudes about the academic potential of female students, hence girls are viewed as less intelligent than boys. This explains why most teachers direct their questions to boys.

2.7 More influential factors in determining school dropout

Studies conducted in various places to find out factors influencing girls 'dropout in primary schools cited some factors to be more influential than others in determining school dropout. A study by UNRWA (2013) which investigated on school dropout found that the overwhelming majority of dropouts in Lebanon, Gaza, and Jordan had repeated at least one grade, and this was true for both males and females. The study discovered that the most influencing school related factor in causing school dropout

was repetition and that students who had repeated a grade were over ten times more likely than others to dropout. Koskei et al (2015) found that the most influencing school related factor in their rank were poor performance in class followed by poor relationship between students and teachers. On the other hand, in a study by Mupuwaliywa and McConel (2016) it was found that students ranked poor relationship between the students and the teachers as first factor that make them drop out. Poor relationship between the students and the teachers was followed by not being in good terms with the administration as the second factor which make students to drop out.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Maslow 's hierarchy of needs informs this study. According to Maslow (1943), humans are fueled by a desire to achieve goals (Thoron & Burleson, 2014). Attaining goals helps humans satisfy specific needs and desires. Maslow identified five categories of basic needs common to all people namely; physiological, safety, love, self-esteem and self- actualization. He represented these needs as a hierarchy in the shape of a pyramid (Martin and Joomis, 2007). According to Maslow, individuals must meet the needs at the lower levels of the pyramid before they can successfully be motivated to tackle the next levels.

The first level of needs are physiological needs which are at the bottom of the triangle and must be met first. Physiological needs include food, shelter, clothing, water, and sleep. If these needs are not met, then all efforts are focused on these needs. Physiological needs are the most important and if they are not met, they will be the most motivating factor for an individual.

After physiological needs have been met, the second level of needs that must be satisfied is safety and security. Safety is the feeling people get when they know no harm will befall them, physically, mentally, or emotionally; security is the feeling people get when their fears and anxieties are low.

Once physiological and safety needs are adequately met, love and belongingness, the third level of needs become important. These needs are met through satisfactory relationships, hence, relationships with family members, friends, peers, classmates, teachers, and other people with whom individuals interact. Satisfactory relationships imply acceptance by others. Having satisfied their physiological and security needs, people can venture out and seek relationships from which their need for love and belonging can be met.

After love and belongingness needs have been met, the fourth level of needs which must be satisfied is self-esteem. Self-esteem includes confidence, achievement, respect of others, admiration of others and a need to be a unique individual. When self-esteem needs are met, individuals feel worth, strength, capability and adequacy. However, if they are not met, the individual will feel inferior, weak and helpless. The last level of need is self-actualization and it refers to the need to become all that one is capable of being to develop one's fullest potential (Thoron & Burleson, 2014). Learning need belongs to this level of need.

2.9 Applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to this study

Learners have needs according to Maslow. When these needs are met, learners are more likely to focus on learning. Learning, therefore, belongs to self-esteem needs and the top of the pyramid as it is difficult to learn if lower level needs are not

satisfied. On the other hand, if schools fail to meet those needs, learners are more likely to withdraw or dropout from school. Therefore, if any of the physiological necessities is missing, for example if learners are hungry or thirsty because schools have no source of water, they cannot concentrate in class. That is why some schools provide free porridge to help learners meet some of their physiological needs. Where learners do not feel safe and secure, for instance because they are teased, abused or harassed, it means their safety and security needs are not met, eventually they will withdraw and even parents will not feel comfortable to send their children to school. Again, if learners feel like they are not loved by their teachers due to harsh treatment or punishments they will not continue with their education. In addition, if learners are ridiculed, mocked now and again when they fail in class instead of being encouraged, they will have low self-esteem and they will not be motivated to continue with their education. All in all, if learners' needs are not met, they drop out of school, failing to reach their potential. As a result, they fail to self-actualize.

Therefore, all levels of needs are applicable in this study and schools must do their best to meet the learners' needs if they are to focus on their studies. Otherwise, if the needs are not met learners will be preoccupied with these worries and concerns and learning and achievement will be the very last thing on their mind.

Similarly, policies that not only make girls go back and stay in schools but also help schools to meet various learners' level of needs, hence, physiological, safety, love, self-esteem and self-actualization needs, will motivate learners to stay in school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

This study investigated school -related factors causing girls’ dropout rates in senior classes at in Machinga rural. This chapter discusses the research methodology. The following aspects are discussed: research paradigm, research design, sampling and sampling procedure, pilot study, data collection procedure, ethical considerations, data collection tools and data analysis.

3.2 Research paradigm

Kuhn (1977) defines the term paradigm as a research culture with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research. This study employed interpretive research paradigm which asserts that reality consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world. In interpretive research, the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2014). According to him, the researcher’s intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, interpretive research paradigm is underpinned by interpreting people ‘s subjective experiences. This paradigm therefore suits this study as it involved interpreting respondents ‘explanations and experiences.

3.3 Research design

A study design is a detailed outline of how an investigation will take place. Kothari (2004) defines a research design as the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. Kumar (2005), on the other hand, explains that a research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to a research question or problem.

This study utilized qualitative research design because of the nature of information collected in this study had qualitative aspects. Qualitative research is a form of social enquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. It is, thus, concerned with subjective assessment of people's beliefs, attitudes, opinions and behavior (Kothari, 2004). The qualitative research design proved relevant to the study because it helped to establish what the respondents believe and perceive as the underlying school related factors for the girls drop out.

3.4 Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Machinga rural, one of the districts in the Southern region of Malawi. Machinga rural was chosen because the girl-child dropout is high as reported by EMIS (2015). Two primary schools and the surrounding communities were targeted.

3.5 Target Population

According to the NSO (2008) population projections, in 2017 Machinga had a population of 647, 401 of which 312, 961 were males and 334, 441 were females. Agriculture is the major economic activity for the people of Machinga. The main ethnic groups in Machinga district are the Yao and Lomwe. The major languages in the district are Chiyao, Chilomwe and Chichewa.

Machinga district has 168 primary schools and out of these, 122 are full primary schools. The district has a total number of 166 292 learners, and 84, 089 of these are girls.

The target population for the study were head teachers, teachers, female students in senior levels in primary schools (standards 6, 7 and 8), female drop outs and members of the School Management Committee. The participants were selected based on their experience with the dropout phenomenon, for instance, parents were selected because they have children who are dropouts.

3.6 Sample and sampling techniques

The sample was selected from the two schools in Machinga rural and their surrounding communities. The two schools were selected using convenience sampling. In convenience sampling, the units that are selected for inclusion in the sample are the easiest to access (Brikci & Green, 2007). The sample comprised of 54 participants, thus 26 participants from each of the two schools and the surrounding communities. From each school, the sample comprised of the head teacher, 6 female students, 6 parents, 6 female drop outs, 4 teachers and 4 members of the School Management Committee.

In selecting the participants, the study employed purposeful sampling. In purposive sampling, participants are selected because they are likely to generate useful data for the project (Brikci & Green, 2007). The participants are thus the knowledgeable ones who reflect most of the characteristics, experience, and representative or typical attributes of the population (Kothari, 2004). In this regard, all participants in this study were those individuals who have direct or indirect experience and knowledge about the school dropout phenomenon and therefore were regarded as examples of purposeful sampling.

3.7 Data collection methods and instruments

3.7.1 Data collection methods

Three methods were used to collect data. The first method was the administration of questionnaires. Questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents (Wikipedia). The questionnaires were administered to the head teachers. The second method was focus group discussions. Focus groups are facilitated discussions with a small group that can allow a researcher to see an issue from a group perspective (Reisman, Gienapp & Stachowiak, 2007). In this study, focus group discussions were ideal because as Riesman et al (2007) put it, focus group discussions provide detailed and richer information than a single interview because of the interaction among members of the group. where the researcher asked questions to groups of respondents and these respondents were teachers, female students in senior levels in primary schools (standards 6, 7 and 8) female drop outs and members of the School Management

Committee. The third method was document analysis. These documents included class registers and admission records.

3.7.2 Data collection instruments

The following instruments were used in the study to collect data

3.7.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to provide information about the schools 'profile, thus, school and classroom aspects including, teacher availability, facilities. This was administered to the head teachers.

3.7.2.2 School records

A number of school records were used. These records included class registers and admission records for the years 2013, 2014 and 2015. The main purpose of examining these records was to establish the trend of girls' enrollment, retention rate in the school and dropout rate in the school in these years.

3.7.2.3 Focus group discussions guidelines

These guidelines provided a means of facilitating discussions with specific groups of participants on the education of girls. There were four focus group discussions guidelines because there were four groups of participants.

3.8 Pilot study

Prior to conducting the main study, the researcher conducted the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted at a primary school in Machinga rural. When selecting the school for the pilot study, the researcher made sure to select a school with almost similar characteristics to the ones where the main studies were conducted. The

researcher conducted focus group discussions with four teachers, three parents, four learners, and four members of school management committee. The pilot study was conducted mainly to identify potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments (Mazza et al, 2006; Kothari, 2004). As suggested by Mazza et al (2006), the school that took part in the pilot study did not take part in the main study.

The results of the pilot study showed repetition, negative comments from male teachers, inadequate infrastructure and punishments as causes of girls' school dropout. Repetition was mentioned as a major cause of girls' dropout. The pilot study assisted in refining focus group discussion guidelines.

3.9 Data analysis

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes were derived from research questions, and information collected was grouped according to themes. Then the information was triangulated across the 4 groups to find areas of convergence and divergence.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The following ethical issues were considered:

3.10.1 Permission

The researcher asked for permission from Machinga DEM to conduct the research because the study involved teachers and learners in Machinga district. Again, permission was sought from the Traditional Authority and the chiefs as the study also involved 1 parent and the school drop outs from the villages surrounding the schools. Permission was granted.

3.10.2 Informed consent

Participants were informed about the study and were also given a description on the intended use of data that to be collected.

3.10.3 Confidentiality

The researcher tried by all means to protect the confidentiality of the participants from other people in the study and from the general public. Participants were assured that the information that they provided would be treated as confidential.

3.10.4 Anonymity

Pseudonyms were used instead of participants' names. The purpose was to ensure that they will not be identifiable in the recorder.

3.11 Limitations

The main limitation was that it was not easy to get some school records, for instance, enrollment rates for earlier years.

3.12 Delimitations

Because of financial constraints, only a small sample was involved as only two schools were studied. Therefore, the data collected may not be generalizable in any way.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Chapter overview

The aim of the study was to investigate school -related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level, in Machinga district. This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected and discusses the findings of the study. Presentation of findings in this study is organized according to the study's research questions.

The study was conducted in two primary schools in Machinga rural. The schools are full primary, co-education government schools. In both schools, each class has one teacher. The two schools have one house each, for the head teacher and the rest of the teachers rent houses away from the school campuses. One of these schools (school A) has three classrooms which cater for three classes only, thus standards 1, 2 and 8 and a grass thatched temporary structure for standard 7 while the rest of the classes learn under the trees. At this school only one class has desks while the rest sit on the floor and on stones. On the other hand, the other school has one grass thatched temporary structures for standard 8 while the rest of the learners learn under trees and there are no desks in all classes.

4.2 School -related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level

A number of factors interact to influence girls' dropouts at primary school level. This study sought to investigate school -related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level through multiple focus group discussions which were conducted with teachers, female students in standards 6, 7 and 8, female drop outs and members of the School Management Committee. The following general themes emerged from the focus group discussions:

4.2.1 Negative comments from teachers

One theme that emerged when the participants were asked to identify factors affecting girls' dropouts was that girls usually receive negative and discouraging comments from teachers. Learners reported that when girls fail in class, they are usually given negative and discouraging comments. One of the learners had this to say *"If a male teacher asks a question in class and a girl attempts to give an answer but gives a wrong answer, that girl is given bad and discouraging comments like u have failed, even examinations you will fail or they would say you are too old for this class, you are even failing and yet the young ones are performing well (FGD/12/4/2017).*

It was also reported that the same thing happens during examinations, as one of the learners explained that *—if a girl fails examinations in most cases we are not encouraged so that we can do better next time. Instead it is all about embarrassing and intimidating comments. For example, a teacher could say, you have failed examinations, I knew it. When it comes to issues of men, you are good at it, but in class you are failing to perform"* (FGD/12/4/2017).

To the learners' surprise, it is only female learners who receive such negative comments as compared to boys as one learner was quoted saying —*what surprises me a lot is that such bad comments are targeted to we girls only such that when it is a boy who has given a wrong answer or fail examinations, the teachers will not say anything bad to them* (FGD/12/4/2017).

When asked who say these negative comments most, between male and female teachers, they said these usually emanate from male teachers. One learner reported that

“I have never received a bad comment from a female teacher. In most cases female teachers encourage us to work hard in class but the male teachers, are the ones who intimidate us with their bad comments” (FGD/12/4/2017). On that, another learner added that —*even the head teacher himself is not different from other male teachers as he is the one on the fore front with those bad comments”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

This theme also emerged during focus discussions with teachers in both schools. Teachers admitted that sometimes they are the ones to be blamed because of what they say to the girls on daily basis. One of the teachers had this to say —

“We have to admit that some of the things we say to our girls on daily basis especially to older girls affect their studies. For example, comments like you are too old for this class, just go and get married” (FGD/12/4/2017).

The theme also emerged during focus discussions with members of Management Committee in both schools. One member had this to say

“In most cases when girls fail in class teachers say demeaning words to those girls instead of encouraging them so that they can improve, comments like you cannot even pass the examinations, you are just wasting your time here”. (FGD/12/4/2017).

On comments given to learners, a study by Sabates et al (2010) found that teachers give more classroom attention and more esteem building encouragement to boys. In relation to this, Chinyoka (2010) observes that teachers affect students' attributions on a daily basis, through their comments to students, feedback on assignments and examinations, and the types of praise that they offer during instruction. On the same, one reason for such negative comments on girls might be due to what Khan et al (2011) reported that most teachers hold negative attitudes about the academic potential of female students, hence girls are viewed as less intelligent than boys. According to Benjamin (2010) this trend of giving girls negative comments in turn creates poor relationships between teachers and students. This poor relationship particularly, makes the students to hate teachers. This hatred is extended to the subjects they teach which eventually leads the students to perform poorly in class and consequently makes them to drop out of school.

In the same line, Maslow stipulates that for people to have self-esteem, they need to be respected, appreciated and admired by others. Learners with self-esteem feel good about themselves and when learners feel good about themselves, they are more likely to become better achievers in the classroom. Vedfelt (2017) adds to say that setting learners up for success and providing positive feedback along with frequent praise are essential tools for both teachers. Thus, as Martin and Joomis (2007) put it, teachers need to find ways they can help students in their classes in order to develop positive feelings about themselves and thus begin to satisfy their needs for self-worth and self-esteem. Therefore, teachers need to be careful in the way they provide feedback. On the contrary, it was learnt in this study that male teachers including the head teacher give feedback in a negative way. This in turn leads to low self-esteem. Eventually,

students may drop out of school because they start questioning their academic potential.

4.2.2 Sexual harassment

Discussion with the participants in both schools also revealed that the girls are usually harassed. It was learnt during the study that girls are usually proposed in schools. One of the dropouts had to say that *“male teachers usually propose girls at school especially when a girl looks grown up and this makes girls very uncomfortable especially when they are not interested in whosoever has proposed them”*.

This theme also emerged during the discussions with learners. One of the learners had to say that *“male teachers are fond of proposing us. If we refuse, then that teacher will always ill treat us”*. Another learner added to say that *“if you refuse that teacher will punish you heavily for no apparent reason or they will just have a negative attitude towards you such that you cannot feel like continuing with your education anymore”*.

Members of SMC also said that this trend is common although it is not allowed for teachers to propose the learners. One of the members had to say that *“teachers are sometimes blamed for learner dropout. Much as they know that it is not allowed to propose learners you will find that they are on the fore front proposing the girls. This disturbs girls’ education in turn”*

When asked who mainly perpetuates the harassment, it was reported that they are usually sexually harassed by male teachers and boys but that being proposed by the teachers is a concern. One of the learners had to say that *“both teachers and boys*

propose us but when it is a teacher who has proposed it bothers you a lot and if he is your class teacher you do not feel comfortable in class”.

However, learners from school A said they are usually harassed by younger male teachers as compared to older teachers while students from school B reported to have been harassed by teachers of all ages. One of the learners from school B had this to say *“the trend is common in both younger and very old teachers. Some old teachers do not even consider the age gap that is there between them and us”.*

Studies by Naunje (2004), Mzuza et al (2014) and Munthali (2010) on factors causing high dropout rates among primary school girls in Malawi, it was revealed that sexual harassment may influence girls to drop out of school. Nkhoma (2010) found that the harassment of girls takes forms of verbal abuse about girls’ physical appearance and physical abuse such as bullying, touching breasts, waist and back sides. It was also found that in some cases main perpetrators of harassment of girls were boys although male teachers were also mentioned in some sites as perpetrators of harassment of girls. This was particularly true in schools whose classes had gone beyond standard 4. Chimombo et al (2000) also found that there are some girls who absent themselves from school because they are scared of the boys and those girls reach the extent of dropping out either because they are scared of boys and teachers.

In a study conducted by Kipkulei et al (2012) on factors affecting girls’ participation in primary school education, it was revealed that apart from manifesting its effects in low enrolment of girls, poor academic performance, teenage pregnancy, early

marriage, increasing rates of HIV and psychological trauma, sexual harassment also manifests itself in high dropout rates.

According to the study results, where male teachers harass learners it creates fear in those learners and learners do not feel comfortable in school. According to Maslow's theory, where fears are created in learners, they cannot concentrate in class. They may not even be motivated to continue with their education and eventually they may drop out of school. Similarly, where parents realize that their children are not safe in schools due to the harassment, they will not send their children to school and as a result the girls will not reach their full potential in life.

4.2.3 Availability of Contraceptives in schools

Another theme that emerged when the participants were asked to identify factors affecting girls' dropout was that girls in senior classes (standards 5, 6, 7 and 8) are given contraceptives by health practitioners. One teacher reported that —*what is happening in our schools is really strange. Unlike in the past, girls are now provided with contraceptive methods, the providers being non-governmental organizations*” (FGD/12/4/2017). Another teacher added to say that —*the students are given all kinds of contraceptives. However, when it comes to condoms, there are some teachers whose responsibility is to keep those condoms, who then distribute them to learners when need arise*” (FGD/12/4/2017).

A certain teacher complained that —*the bad thing about it is that it has been observed that since the distribution of those contraceptives began, the behavior of girls has*

become an issue to worry about. Controlling girls' behavior nowadays is not as easy as it used to be.

The teachers agreed with each other that the students now feel like they are on the same level with teachers as one teacher was quoted saying that *"just because they are given those contraceptives, they no longer listen to us or fear us when we try to advise them as they feel like we are now on the same level"* (FGD/12/4/2017).

On how the issue has affected school dropout the teachers reported that the number of school dropouts has really increased, as one said that *—before the intervention girls were dropping out of school yes, but not in large numbers as compared to the case after the intervention of providing intervention* (FGD/12/4/2017). The teachers emphasized that a major challenge with the contraceptives is that the provision of contraceptives is not consistent. Eventually, learners fall pregnant and dropout of school. One teacher had this to say *the major challenge with the contraceptives is that the provision is not consistent. In most cases it takes time before they come again to provide to the learners, eventually, they get pregnancy* (FGD/12/4/2017).

Teachers in both schools questioned the distribution of contraceptives to girls in senior classes by health practitioners as one way contributing to girls' dropout. This is in line with the view of others who argued that rather pupils should be taught to abstain as encouraging them to use contraceptives it is like telling children that it is okay to be sexually active at a young age.

However, in a study conducted by Tuyisenge et al (2018), it was found that provision of contraceptives to learners in schools was against some cultural and religious beliefs

that do not support the idea of contraceptives in schools, adding that the learners were underage to be sexually active. On the other hand, some parents were in support of the provision of contraceptives, arguing that it is one way of preventing early pregnancies among the girls. These results are in line with the findings by Mudonhi et al (2019), who found that parents and communities believe that contraceptives, for instance, condoms are associated with European culture and this violates African beliefs, and therefore did not support the idea of contraceptives in schools.

As with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, girls have a need to self-actualize, hence, to realize their full potential. However, to do so they need support and encouragement from time to time, hence a need to encourage them to work very hard in their studies. If on the other hand girls are encouraged on other things other than their education, they will not fulfill their dreams, therefore, failing to self-actualize. For instance, as it was found that the contraceptives act as an invitation for girls to start indulging in promiscuous behavior and this immoral behavior results in girls absconding classes, not paying attention in classes and finally dropping out of school altogether. Therefore, once they drop out of school, they cannot realize their full potential.

4.2.4 Content of Life skills subject and the way it is handled by male teachers

Another theme that emerged when the participants were asked to identify factors affecting girls 'dropout was life skills subject. However, school going learners and teachers reported that life skills contribute to school dropout in a different way. Teachers are especially concerned with the content of the subject as one teacher was quoted saying —*much as Life Skills was introduced to equip students with important*

skills, on the other hand, it has topics which pupils after learning are emotionally forced to go and practice what they are taught or not taught well, hence, the subject has resulted in an increase in promiscuous cases (FGD/12/4/2017).

Teachers also have a feeling that some contents of Life Skills subject are beyond the learners' age, as one teacher explained that —*some contents of Life Skills subject are beyond the learners' age at primary school as the learners are mostly young and therefore not mature enough to make informed decisions*” (FGD/12/4/2017). On the other hand, learners' concern is not on the content of Life skills subject, but rather the way the subject is taught, as one learner complained that —*many teachers' especially male teachers do not handle the lesson well. Some topics talk about both boys and girls but you find that if the subject is handled by a male teacher as is mostly the case, that teacher will talk a lot about girls' issues than boys' and in a very embarrassing way. As a result, the boys will just be looking at us and even make fun of us*—(FGD/13/4/2017).

Another learner explained that —*whenever it is time for Life skills I do not feel comfortable in class. I do not even concentrate, how you can concentrate when the teacher is in front embarrassing you in front of boys*” (FGD/13/4/2017). On a sad note, a certain learner explained that “*because of way the subject is handled, I have developed negative attitude towards it. Therefore, what I normally do is that when it is time for Life skills I get permission to go outside. I wait till the lesson ends and when it is time for another subject it is when I go back to class*” (FGD/13/4/2017).

In line with this finding, as Pickhardt (2013) puts it, there are two emotional states in adolescence that people often discount that can actually be very serious indeed. The first is embarrassment. Adolescents are very easy to embarrass because this is the age

of in between when one is no longer a child but not yet an adult and the emotional impact of embarrassment can be intense and if embarrassment is powerful enough it can lead to withdraw. Therefore, teachers have to be very careful with the way they handle sensitive topics, otherwise, learners may withdraw as it was reported that *“because of way the subject is handled, I have developed a negative attitude toward it. Therefore, what I normally do is that when it is time for Life skills I get permission to go outside. I wait till the lesson ends and when it is time for another subject is when I go back to class”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

On the other hand, teachers mentioned the content of the subject as not fit for the level of students, therefore end up experiment sexually. However, this is different from findings of studies conducted by Essere (2008) on the effect of sex education programme on-going adolescents where it was found that students exposed to sex education did not engage in sex behaviors.

However, deep rooted conservatism, misconceptions and cultural beliefs appear to be some of the factors challenging successful implementation of Life skills curriculum. In a study conducted by Chirwa and Naidoo (2014), it was found that in Malawi, rural communities consider that life skills education estranges children from their cultural roots by discouraging children to attend initiation schools. It was also found that parents in rural communities are also opposed to illustrations on sexual development in the learning material. On the other hand, a study conducted in Punjab state in India found non-acceptance by parents to be another challenge (Grover, 2018). It was discovered that most parents give first preference to academic subjects of their wards

and they were of the opinion that life skills can be learnt later on in life. Majority of them considered Life skills as wastage of time.

4.2.5 Lack of female teachers in senior classes

Lack of female teachers in senior classes was another theme that emerged when the participants were asked to identify factors affecting girls' dropout. Learners from school B reported that they do not have a female teacher in their classes. One learner had to say that *"our school has a good number of female teachers yet none of them is allocated to teach standards 5, 6, 7 and 8. Instead, we are taught by male teachers only. All female teachers teach standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 four"* (FGD/13/4/2017). Another learner added that *—I have been learning at this school from standard 1. I am now in standard 7 but the last class I was taught by a female teacher was standard 4, so from standard 5 it has been male teachers only and yet all the years this school has been having female teachers"* (FGD/13/4/2017).

When asked what is wrong with being taught by male teachers only, learners reported that they do not very comfortable to discuss some issues with male teachers as compared to female teachers. One learner said that *—because we are taught by male teachers only, in turn we lack someone with whom we can openly discuss some issues as there are some issues which we cannot openly discuss with male teachers"* (FGD/13/4/2017).

On the same, another student added to say that *"there some issues that if we tell male teachers they just shout us and sometimes they do not even pay attention, and we feel that if we tell the same issues to female teachers they can easily understand and help us accordingly"* (FGD/13/4/2017).

Learners also explained that they do not feel comfortable in class to be taught by male teachers. One learner reported that *“I do not feel comfortable to be taught by male teachers all day, it would have been better if some subjects were taught by female teachers so that we can experience a change”* (FGD/13/4/2017).

It was established during the study that the school has both male and female teachers. The females were about 10 in number although none is allocated to teach standards 5, 6, 7 and 8. It was further established that most female teachers are enrolled in night/open schools therefore they prefer junior classes where they knock off earlier so that they can then attend night/open schools in the afternoon.

It was also learnt during the study that being taught by male teachers only affected learners' interest to learn. One student had to say that *„since we are taught by male teachers only, in most cases I do not have interest to learn and I attend lessons just because I do not have any other choice.*

The research findings show that lack of female teachers in senior classes contributes to girls' school dropout because apart from feeling very uncomfortable with being taught by male teachers only, girls also lack a female teacher with whom they can openly discuss their issues with as there are some issues which they cannot openly discuss with male teachers (Nkhoma, 2010) This is similar to findings of studies conducted by Chinyoka (2014) and Amadi et.al (2013) which investigated causes of school drop-out among ordinary level learners who found that it is easier for pupils to associate with teachers of their gender as they find them more approachable and understanding. Hence the presence of enough female teachers to act as mentors and counselors is critical in keeping girls in school.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one of the needs that have to be satisfied in order for girls to concentrate in their studies is safety (Martin and Joomis, 2007). Girls need the school environment where emotionally they will feel safe. Therefore, where they are only taught by male teachers whom the girls have reported that they cannot openly discuss their issues with, they may not feel safe. On the other hand, by providing them with female teachers who will hear them, understand them and help them solve their issues accordingly they will feel safe. By having their safety needs met girls will concentrate in their studies and at the same time they will be attracted to remain in school.

4.2.6 Poor performance and repetition

Another theme that came out was poor performance and repetition. The participants revealed that poor performance and repetition forces girls out of school before completing primary school cycle. One of the parents whose child dropped out of school explained that —

“My daughter really wanted to reach standard 8 then go to secondary school. Unfortunately, she spent a lot of years repeating same classes; this discouraged her a lot, and then, she stopped going to school” (FGD/12/4/2017).

Another parent added to say that *“from standard 1 up to standard 4 my daughter was doing well in class. From standard 5 she started performing poorly and therefore was repeating classes. She continued performing poorly up to standard 7 first term when she decided to drop out”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

This theme also emerged during the focus group discussions with dropouts. Out of 9 dropouts from school A, 4 reported to have dropped out due to repetition, while from school B it was 5 out of 9. One drop out had to say that —

“I repeated standard 4 and 5. By the time I was in standard 6, the ones I started school with were already in standard 8. I was tired with repeating then I just stopped going to school” (FGD/12/4/2017).

Another dropout added that —

“I repeated two classes, and by the time I reached standard 6 I was looking older as compared to my fellow girls in the class. I was ashamed of myself. Then I just dropped out (FGD/12/4/2017)”.

Learners too reported that poor performance and repetition can lead to school dropout because some learners make fun of you. One of the learners had to say that *“if you repeat a class several times, some learners laugh at you. It even becomes an issue especially if you are not doing well in class” (FGD/12/4/2017).*

In this research, it was found that after repetition they end up dropout because they are usually laughed at and made fun of. This is similar to study findings by Hikarawa and Fata (2012), Chinyoka (2014) and Mguni (2014) found that repetition of the pupils was one of the main causes of girls drop outs in primary schools. Hikarawa and Fata (2012) reported that girls feel discouraged to repeat the same for class several times, one reason being that they end up reaching puberty stage while still in primary school, a stage which is associated with a lot of pressures, for instance, pressures of forced marriages by the community.

In line with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, poor performance and repetition as well as the embarrassment associated with poor performance and repetition may lead to low

self-esteem. It is only those learners with self-esteem that feel good about themselves and it is when learners feel good about themselves, that they are more likely to become better achievers in the classroom. As Pickhardt (2014) put it, if embarrassment is powerful enough it can lead to withdraw. Therefore, learners who perform poorly are more likely to withdraw from school due to embarrassment.

4.2.7 Punishments

Heavy punishment was another theme that emerged during the discussions as another factor that can lead to school dropout. Learners from both schools stated that punishments are normal but it becomes an issue when they are too much for them. One of the learners explained that —*there is nothing wrong with being punished once you have committed an offence; but most of the punishments which we are given are usually much heavier as compared to the offence that has been committed* (FGD/13/4/2017).

When probed to give examples of the heavy punishments, digging out tree stumps, banned from class and digging pit latrines of your height were mentioned as punishments which are usually given to students in both schools. One student from school A expressed her experience of how she was given a heavy punishment for a simple offence; she explained that —*last term I was playing with a very small piece of chalk in class. My teacher saw me playing with that chalk. I was told to dig a pit latrine of my height as a punishment*” (FGD/13/4/2017).

Another learner added that —*even when you are found making noise in class you are usually given a heavy punishment like digging out a tree stump*” (FGD/13/4/2017).

Learners complained about such kinds of punishments, as one of learners had to say that —*to us girls, such punishments are not easy to do. Maybe to boys it is okay because they are used to such kinds of work*” (FGD/13/4/2017). Another learner added that —

“such punishments usually take time to complete and this makes us miss a lot of lessons as such punishments are done during class times. Even if we do the punishment after classes, we end up reporting home very late”
(FGD/13/4/2017).

This theme also emerged during focus group discussions with the dropouts. Just like the learners, they complained about the nature of punishments given to them during their time and that they contributed in one way or the other to their dropout. One of the dropouts who dropped while in standard six explained how she was banned by her teacher from attending one of the subjects as a punishment. She had to say that —

“one morning I was late for class and found my teacher already in class, teaching. She did not allow me to attend the lesson and also banned from me from attending that subject, all because I was late. The term even ended without giving me another chance to attend the subject. I was discouraged a lot and I just stopped going to class school, so that is I dropped”
(FGD/12/4/2017).

Punishments as a factor also emerged during the focus group discussions with members of school management committee. They said that in most cases they see learners, including girls, doing punishments that seem too big for the learners. *One of the members had to say that “in most cases I pass through this way here and I see the learners working as punishment. Sometimes you find learners digging out tree stumps, sometimes you find them digging pit latrines*” (FGD/12/4/2017).

Several studies found punishment misappropriation to be a major cause of girls drop out. Naunje (2004) found that the mostly administered punishments in schools were harsh and quite commonly the outlawed corporal types that infringe body pains. For those that are acceptable, the duration and magnitude is not acceptable as some duration could be up to the whole day. Similarly, Chimombo et al (2000) also found that students, girls inclusive, are given harsh punishments such as removing stumps, molding bricks and cleaning toilets. This leads to absenteeism which has sometimes resulted in dropouts in some sites. However, Imitaz (2011) states that it is because of lack of professional development that make teachers to administer such punishments as the untrained teachers do not know the management of students' behavior.

In a school where learners are given harsh punishments every time they commit a simple offence, they will end up develop a spirit of fear. As Maslow put it, due to that spirit of fear learners will not be able to concentrate in their studies and eventually, they may resort to withdrawing. At the same time, due to heavy punishments, learners are more likely to get tired. Therefore, where rest, a physiological need, is not met instead learners are tired, they will not focus much on their studies and instead they may be sleeping while lessons are in progress.

4.2.8 Inadequate infrastructure and desks

Another theme that emerged during the focus group discussions in both schools was inadequate infrastructure. It was learnt during the study that the problem is common in both schools and that it is one of the biggest impediments towards girls' education attainment. Students from both schools reported lack of classrooms as one of the factors likely to cause student dropout. One of the learners had to say that —*the*

situation at this school is really pathetic, most of us learn outside, just under the trees” (FGD/12/4/2017).

It was noted further through the information collected through questionnaires that the school blocks for school A were not enough to cater for all classes, thus standards 1 to standard 8. For example, at school A, they have two classroom blocks (three classrooms) only which caters for three classes only, thus standards 1, 2 and 8. This means that standards 4 up to standard 7 do not have classrooms. It was learnt that those in standards 4 up to standard 6 learn under a tree while those in standard 7 learn in a grass thatched temporary structure which has no walls at all. The focus group discussion results show that due to all this, during rainy season classes are usually interrupted. One learner explained that *“due to shortage of classrooms, lessons are usually disturbed especially during rainy season. When rains start, lessons end there and we are told to go home or to seek refuge in classroom”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

Those in standard 8 added to say that although they are lucky in a sense that they have classrooms, still they suffer because during the rainy season, they usually mix with pupils from other classes who abandon their classes under the tree due to the rain. One standard 8 learner had to say that *—during rainy season, our lessons are disturbed too. When rain starts, those who learn under the trees usually come in our class to seek refuge. As a result, our lessons end there because there are is a lot of noise that the teacher cannot continue to teach”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

A standard 6 student from school A was quoted complaining that *“It is not easy to learn under a tree because apart from rain season there is also cold season when we suffer a lot. In addition, there are a lot of disturbances when we are learning, for*

instance, pupils from other classes make noise during break time as we break at different times”

Shortage of desks also came out to be a major problem experienced in both schools which in turn has an impact on girls’ education. In school, the problem is real, as it was learnt that only one class has desks while the rest do not have. One of the standard 6 learners had to say that *“It is only standard 8 classroom that has desks while the rest of the classrooms have no desks at all. As such we sit either on the floor or on bricks.*

One student from school B added to say that *—When I was in junior classes I worked hard so that I can go to senior classes hoping that I will be sitting on desks but look, I am now in standard seven but still sit on the floor when learning.*

Another learner complained that *“you leave home well bathed and well-dressed just to sit on the floor when you get here and get dirty. It really hurts such that you do not feel like attending classes every day. It is better to stay home when you will look clean all day.*

The theme also emerged during the focus group discussions with teachers, who reported that lack of desks is really an issue in their schools and that it really has an impact on girls’ education. One teacher had to say that *—this lack of desks really has an effect on girls as you know most of the girls in from standard 5 are adolescents and this is the stage where they are more conscious with their appearance. Therefore, they feel bad when they sit on the floor and get dirty.*

The theme also emerged during discussions with members of school management committee. They reported that it is one of the big problems, as one of the members said that *“lack of desks is one of the major problems at this school that we fear can affect girls interest in school. For junior classes I think it is a little better, but for the*

senior classes they do not feel comfortable to get dirty everyday due to sitting on the floor.

In line with these study findings on inadequate desks in schools, Chimombo et al (2000) reported that all schools visited in their study had some pupils sitting on the floor and that all the girls sat on the dirty dusty floor in front. Kipkulei et al, (2012) found that 91% of the pupils both strongly agreed and agreed that this school factor is a contributor to their participation in education. Their study results clearly showed that availability of resources enhances or promotes girls 'participation in education, while inadequacy of these resources adversely affects their participation.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, learners' safety needs have to be met first if they are to concentrate in their studies. They should get to know that no harm will befall them. However, where learning takes place while sitting on the mere floor without desks, learners are not protected from the dirty dusty floor. This in turn put learners at a risk of illnesses like flu and coughing. Similarly, where learning takes place outside it means learners are not protected from harsh weather conditions, for instance, intense wind and sun. All this means that the school has failed to meet learners 'safety needs. As a result, learners may lose interest in learning and eventually may resort to withdraw.

4.2.9 Lack of teachers' dedication

It was noted during the discussions with school going girls in both schools that teachers are not dedicated to their work. When asked how, the respondents said that teachers usually report late for work. One student had to say that —*we always wait for*

teachers for a long time before school assembly start such that by the time classes start it is usually very late” (FGD/12/4/2017).

It was also reported that teachers are fond of missing classes when they are around. One learner reported that —*our teacher often misses lessons while she is around the school compass. We are just left in class unattended to. Therefore, it becomes boring to be just chatting in class instead of learning* —(FGD/12/4/2017).

On this, another learner added that “*there are some teachers who are always seen chatting yet they know it is their time to teach, yet if they are reminded that they are supposed to teach they say that they are tired, and this keeps us wondering how can someone be tired when he/she did not teach any single lesson*” (FGD/12/4/2017).

It was also learnt that some teachers knock off earlier. One learner had to say that “*teachers here also have a tendency of knocking off earlier than the recommended time, such that they just knock off even before it is time as long as they feel like they are tired*”

(FGD/12/4/2017).

Teachers from both schools also mentioned the same that they usually report late for work, the reason being that all of them stay very far. One teacher from school A was quoted saying —*In most cases we report late for work, not intentionally though, but because all of us stay very far from here, almost 10km away*” (FGD/12/4/2017).

On the same, another teacher said that “*As you can see there is no even a single teacher’s house at this school and every day, we have to walk a distance of 10km and*

by the time we reach here it is always late and this really put students off” (FGD/12/4/2017).

Another one commented that

“as you can see, we do not even have any means of transport. No cars come to this direction. Some of us have no bicycles, so this thing of reporting late for work is more likely to happen” (FGD/12/4/2017).

The theme also emerged during the discussions with members of school management committee (SMC). One of the members reported that *almost teachers report late for work, we come here every morning to cook porridge for the learners but by the time we leave the school premises you find that some teachers have not yet reported for work”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

Another member added that *“we understand that the problem is that most of the teachers operate far away from here, that is why they always report late for work. Therefore, we do not blame them”* (FGD/12/4/2017).

All this make learners feel that going to school is just a wastage of time because they do not learn. Eventually, they resort to dropout. One learner had this to say *most of the times we have a \feeling that it is better to be staying home than coming here every day to waist our time because we do not learn.* (FGD/12/4/2017).

It is generally said that civil servants in Malawi, more especially teachers, are fond of being absent from work due to low motivation which in most cases results in their engaging in personal business (Naunje, 2004). However, in school A where this was reported, absenteeism was not mentioned as one of the indicators of lack of teachers’

dedication. Instead, the reported lack of dedication was in terms of late coming, knocking off earlier, and missing lessons while they are around.

In line with Maslow 's hierarchy of needs, every person has a capability to self-actualize, that is a person 's desire to become everything he or she is capable of becoming—to realize and use his or her full potential, capacities, and talents. Education is the most important platform that can help one to self-actualize. Therefore, teachers play an important role in helping learners realize their full potential. However, where teachers lack dedication to do their work it will have an effect on learners 'ability to realize their full potential, hence to self-actualize. And when learners realize that their teachers are not helpful, they may lose interest in schooling and therefore they may eventually dropout.

4.3 Which factors are perceived influential in determining girls drop out?

When asked which factors are more influential in determining school dropout, different groups had different views. However, despite the differences in views on most influential factors from different participants, it is worth noting that all participants singled out repetition as the most influential factor. Learners in both schools just like other participants also ranked repetition as a major factor that can influence one to drop out of school. One of the learners from school A who had repeated a class before had to say that *repetition is the most influencing factor because from experience, it really feels bad to see the ones you started together with being ahead of you.* Another learner added to say that *it is also not easy to withstand the shame that is associated with repeating the same class. This is because you are viewed as a failure by everybody.*

Although the first most influencing factor was the same for learners from both schools, they differed on the second most influencing factor. Learners from school A ranked sexual harassment as the second most influencing factor because to them, sexual harassment just like repetition leaves one with a sense of hopelessness. One learner had to say that *„being proposed by teachers whom we look up to like parents here at school is really a big discouragement to us girls. Instead of them being on the forefront encouraging us to refrain from sexual activities they are the ones pushing us into it. Another learner from school A added to say that „even the consequences you have to suffer after denying the proposal is enough to force you out of school.*

On the other hand, learners from school B ranked negative comments from teachers as the second most influencing factor that can cause school dropout because the comments are always discouraging in a way. One learner had to say that *„the impact of the comments that the teachers give us are always discouraging and powerful enough to force us out of the education system”.*

Just like all other participants, dropouts from both schools ranked repetition as the most influencing factor causing school dropout. One of the dropouts had to say that

“Most of us dropped out of this school because of repetition. The bad thing about repetition is that it delays you while the ones you started with are progressing. Another dropout added to say that even if you repeat a class just once then you are no longer at the same level with the ones who did not repeat and it really discourages you from continuing with education”.

Another dropout also added that *it even becomes an issue if you repeat more than once.*

People will always look at you as a failure and will make fun of you.

In views of dropouts, apart from repetition, they ranked punishments as the second most influential factor in determining school dropout. One of the dropouts was quoted saying:

“My friends here can agree with me that the kinds of punishments which we were always given also contributed a lot to our decision to drop out. When the punishment is just too big as it was always the case, you no longer have interest to continue going to school because you feel like you are not liked at the school by your teachers. Another learner added to say that —punishments is also a most determining factor in school dropout because once you have been given a big punishment it feels like you are a prisoner because you are not a free person until the punishment is done.

On the other hand, parents and members of SMC emphasized repetition and punishments as the most influencing factors. One parent whose child was a school dropout was quoted saying that:

“Much as there a number of factors contributing to dropout, but repetition is the most influencing factor especially when a girl repeats for several times because it discourages someone it feels like your effort in your studies is yielding nothing. Another parent added to say that girls complain a lot when they are repeating the same class because they fear that people will make fun of them and that they will be looking too big for their class”.

In views of parents and members of SMC, after repetition, the second most influencing factor is punishment. One member of school management had to say that :

“big punishments pushes learners especially girls out of education system because when learners are always given big punishments they feel like they are not liked by their teachers in the end they have no interest in school.

One parent also had to say that *“some punishments cause body harm and learners especially girls cannot withstand that. In the end, the only option they have is to stop completely from going to school”*.

Teachers on the other hand, just like all other participants, cited repetition as the most influencing factor. One teacher had to say that *—girls in most cases when they have repeated a class for more than once, chances are always very slim that they will continue up to standard 8. Another teacher had to say that once girls have grown up, especially when they have reached senior classes, they view repetition in a negative way. This increases chances of them dropping out of school as it has always been the case.*

Teachers, ranked inadequate school blocks and desks as the second most influencing factor. One teacher said that *in senior classes most girls are at an adolescence stage when they become conscious with their appearance, therefore, sitting on the floor do not motivate them to continue coming here at school.*

However, it is worth noting that learners cited lack of desks as the least influencing factor as one of the learners had to say that *sitting on the floor, just as it can influence one to drop out of school, but the impact of one getting dirty cannot be compared with the impact of other factors like repetition or the rest of the factors.*

In addition, teachers cited contraceptives and life skills as the most influencing factors of school dropout. And unlike all other participants, teachers did not mention negative comments, sexual harassment, punishments and lack of female teachers in senior classes, as the most influencing factors. All in all, the more influential factors in their

rank as suggested by the participants include repetition, negative comments, sexual harassment, punishments, lack of female teachers in senior classes, Life skills, lack of teachers' dedication, inadequate classrooms and desks, and finally contraceptives.

While this study found the more influential factors in determining girls' dropout in their rank to be repetition, negative comments, sexual harassment, punishments, lack of female teachers in senior classes, Life skills, lack of teachers dedication, inadequate classrooms and desks, and finally contraceptives, on the other hand a study by UNRWA (2013) which investigated on school dropout found that the overwhelming majority of dropouts in Lebanon, Gaza, and Jordan had repeated at least one grade, and this was true for both males and females. The study discovered that the most influencing school related factor in causing school dropout was repetition and that students who had repeated a grade were over ten times more likely than others to dropout.

Koskei et al (2015) on the other hand found that the most influencing school related factor in their rank were poor performance in class followed by poor relationship between students and teachers. In a study by Mupuwaliywa and McConel (2016) it was found that students ranked poor relationship between the students and the teachers as first factor that make them drop out. Poor relationship between the students and the teachers was followed by not being in good terms with the administration as the second factor which make students to drop out. Therefore, the results of this study are not different from the previous studies as poor performance. In conclusion, it can be established that performance plays an important role in determining learners' decision whether to continue o

4.4 How to mitigate school dropout at school level

Another research question in the research study was to find out how the problem of school dropout can be tackled especially at school level. Looking at the factors that came out as contributing to school drop, the parents, SMC, dropouts and learners suggested the following:

4.4.1 Teachers who propose girls must be punished

During the study it was learnt that girls are proposed by male teachers. Again, it was learnt that if they refuse, they are given punishments without breaking any school rules. To mitigate this problem of teachers harassing girls, participants in both suggested that teachers who propose girls must be punished to deter the would be offenders. One of the dropouts had to say that —*the teachers who are fond of proposing girls should be dealt with by being punished. This will prevent others from doing the same thing as they will learn something and they will stop*”.

On the same, one of the parents had to say that:

“It is necessary that the school should choose someone, for instance, the head teacher to whom the learners can report to once they have been harassed. Then the reported teacher should be punished”.

Studies show that in some countries like Kenya they have laws in which teachers who commit such crimes are punished. Criminal law in Kenya specifically addresses teachers and other school staff and it provides for a prison sentence of not less than ten years for any person who being the head teacher or employee in a primary or secondary school or special institution of learning whether formal or informal, takes advantage of his or her official position to sexually harass a pupil or student (Thomas et al, 2012). Similarly, in the UK, the sexual offences act makes any sexual

relationship, sexual touching and several other types of sexual activity criminal when an adult is in a position of trust in relation to a child, including a teacher or staff in an education institution

It was discovered during the study that sexual harassment by teachers instills the spirit of fear in learners and according to Maslow's theory; if the learners' safety needs are not met they cannot concentrate in their studies. Therefore, as participants suggested, if learners see that teacher offenders are punished, they will feel that they are protected. In turn, they will know that their safety needs are met by the school. Similarly, if they have someone to forward their complaints to, who will understand and help them accordingly they will concentrate in their studies without any fear.

4.4.2 Provision of contraceptives must be discouraged

The study found that there is a tendency of distributing contraceptives to girls in school which act as an invitation for girls to start indulging in promiscuous behavior, eventually leading to school dropping out. Participants suggested that this distribution of contraceptives must be discouraged. One of the teachers had to say that:

“Learners should be told to concentrate on their studies only, otherwise, if they are given contraceptives, it is like encouraging them to indulge in sexual act, and the two cannot go together”.

The teachers added that most girls do not do well in class and with the contraceptives then the situation will worsen. One of them had to say that —*most girls struggle already with their studies in a sense that they do not perform well and by encouraging them in sexual activities their performance in class will become poorer”.*

In line with the respondents' suggestions that contraceptives should not be made available to learners, studies have found that parents support abstinence plus sex education in schools. The parents want to move from abstinence-only education to abstinence-plus curricula that include information about birth control programmes that are balanced and realistic, encourage students to postpone sex until they are older and have proven effective at delaying first intercourse.

As with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, girls have a need to self-actualize, hence, to realize their full potential. However, to do so they need support and encouragement from time to time, hence a need to encourage them to work very hard in their studies. If on the other hand girls are encouraged on other things other than their education, they will not fulfill their dreams, therefore, failing to self-actualize. For instance, as it was found that the contraceptives act as an invitation for girls to start indulging in promiscuous behavior and this immoral behavior results in girls absconding classes, not paying attention in classes and finally dropping out of school altogether. Therefore, once they drop out of school, they cannot realize their full potential.

4.4.3 Construction of school blocks

The study found that learners learn under trees while sitting on the floor or bricks and this in turn forces girls out of school. To deal with this problem, participants in both schools suggested that schools should increase number of school blocks so that learners should be motivated to learn. One of the parents had to say that —*the school should at least construct more classroom blocks. I am sure if lessons are conducted in real classrooms other than outside the girls will be motivated to learn.*

On the same, one of the teachers explained that —*A conducive learning environment with school blocks and desks can greatly motivate girls to continue learning instead of dropping out of school due to sitting on the floor and under the trees.*

Nkhoma (2010) also states that ensuring safe and non-discriminatory school environments is another way to increase the likelihood that girls who enroll in school will keep coming to class. Schools should have the necessary facilities such comfortable chairs and desks. These help to reduce absenteeism among girls. World Bank (1996) also encourages schools to invest in the necessary structures hence schools, facilities for girls, toilets, dormitories, walls and desks.

In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a conducive learning environment is very important if girls are to be retained in schools. With classroom blocks, learners are well protected from a number of things, including harsh weather conditions. Similarly, if they sit on desks they will be protected from dirty floors as well as illnesses associated with dirty and dusty floors.

4.4.4 Female teachers must teach in senior classes

The research discovered that all senior classes were being taught by male teachers despite the availability of female teachers. Participants suggested that female teachers too must teach in senior classes so that girls can talk to them freely. One of the learners had to say that *just like what they do in the junior classes, female teachers should be assigned to teach senior classes. In that case some of our problems will be solved because we will be talking to them freely, rather than being taught by the male teachers only*".

Another learner explained that an alternative is to have a female teacher who will be addressing girl learner's issues. She had to say that *"if it is not possible to have female teacher to teach us, then at least if the school can choose a female teacher to be meeting girls just to help us dealing with some issues"*

Nkhoma (2010) also suggests that the presence of enough female teachers is important so as to act as mentors and counselors which is critical in keeping girls in school. Female teachers not only motivate girls to remain in school but also act as advisors and counselors to girls when faced with issues that are more comfortably discussed with females. In a study conducted by Juma (2011) to investigate school related factors influencing girls' dropout, it was revealed that schools where there are more qualified teachers and more female teachers, girls were more able to articulate barriers to their education.

Where the school has female teachers with which girls can share their concerns with, they will feel safe and because their safety needs are met, they will concentrate on their studies and they will excel. On the other hand, where learners have issues and no one is there to listen to them and help them they will not concentrate on their studies instead they will be stuck on how to deal with the unresolved issues. Consequently, they may withdraw from school, thereby failing to realize their full potential at the same time.

4.4.5 Content of Life skills subject should be age appropriate and teachers have to be trained on how to handle it

It was learnt during the study that the content of Life skills subject is beyond the age of learners at primary school such that it has increased promiscuity as the learners fail

to make informed decisions. To deal with this, participants suggested that the content of Life skills subject has to be age appropriate. One of the teachers had to say —*when writing the content for Life skills, it is necessary to consider the fact that the material is for primary learners because most of the learners are very young.*

Another teacher added that *“because of the nature of the content of the subject, it needs teachers with special skills to be handled properly, otherwise, an open minded person can find it difficult to teach”*.

On the other hand, learners suggested that they do not like it when male teachers handle the subject; instead they would prefer the subject to be handled by female teachers. One of them had to say that” *the subject should be handled by female teachers so that we may develop interest in the subject than what the male teachers do when teaching it”*

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Chapter overview

The aim of this study was to investigate school -related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level, in Machinga rural. The study was done in two schools and the surrounding communities. This chapter provides the conclusion of the study findings and the recommendations.

5.2 Summary of the findings

The following is the summary of the study findings:

a. School -related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level

Regarding the factors, a number of school related factors were found to influence school dropout. The factors include negative comments from teachers, availability of contraceptives, repetition, content of Life skills subject and the way it is handled, repetition, sexual harassment, lack of female teachers in senior classes, punishments, and lack of dedication of teachers. These factors are summarized below.

b. Negative comments from teachers

The study found that negative comments from teachers have an influence on learners' dropout. It was found when girls have done something wrong, including failing in class they are usually given negative comments which in a way act as discouragement. The study established that the negative comments usually emanate from male teachers including the head teacher himself, who also happens to be on the

forefront. Such negative comments are so discouraging and so degrading and they lead to low self-esteem and loss of self-confidence. Eventually female students lose interest in schooling and the end result is that they withdraw from school.

c. Availability of Contraceptives

The study found that those girls in senior classes are given contraceptives by health practitioners. The study established that this tendency had greatly influenced girls to be indulging in promiscuity thereby others getting early marriages, unwanted pregnancies resulting in an increase in girls' dropout rates. Therefore, before the intervention girls were not dropping out of school in large numbers as compared to the case after the intervention of providing intervention.

d. Life skills subject content and the way it is handled

It was learnt during the study that Life skills has topics which pupils after learning are emotionally forced to go and practice what they are taught or not taught well thereby contracting diseases, unwanted pregnancies and early marriages. In addition, some contents of Life Skills subject are beyond the learners' age at primary school that are mostly young and therefore not mature enough to make informed decisions. On the other hand, it was discovered that male teachers do not handle the lesson well. They talk a lot about girls' issues than boys' and in a very embarrassing way such that you cannot attend the lesson comfortably.

e. Repetition

Poor performance and repetition were also found to force girls out of school before completing primary school cycle. The study established that it is common for girls to

repeat one or more classes before reaching standard 8. It was also noted that in those cases where learners repeat classes, the repeaters are usually mocked at and are usually made fun of which in way act as a discouragement to those victims of repetition and consequently may resort to drop out of school.

f. Sexual harassment

The study found that girls are usually harassed in schools, usually by male teachers and boys. Male teachers were reported to propose girls and if the girls refuse then that teacher ill always ill treat you. For instance, they will punish you heavily for no apparent reason or they will just have a negative attitude towards you such that you cannot feel like continuing with your education anymore.

g. Lack of female teachers in senior classes

Lack of female teachers was also another factor contributing to school dropout. It was found that senior classes are taught by male teachers only despite the fact that female teachers are available. This makes girls very uncomfortable. In addition, girls lack a female teacher with whom they can openly discuss their issues as there are some issues which they cannot openly discuss with male teachers.

h. Punishments

The study found that punishments can also contribute to school dropout because punishments which are given to girls are usually much heavier than the offence committed. Digging out tree stumps, banned from class and digging pit latrines of your height were mentioned as punishments which are usually given to students in both schools. It was learnt during the study that the punishments are not easy and it

takes time to complete them which makes girls to miss a lot of lessons as such punishments are done during class times.

i. Inadequate infrastructure and desks

Inadequate infrastructure was also found to be common in both schools and that it is one of the biggest impediments towards girls' education attainment. It was noted that the 73 school blocks were not enough to cater for all classes. Therefore, most classes learn under the trees as such during rainy season classes are usually interrupted as when rains start lessons end there and students are told to go home or to seek refuge in classroom. Shortage of desks also came out to be a major problem experienced in both schools which in turn has an impact on girls' education. Learners therefore sit either on the floor or on bricks. Girls feel like it is not clean for them to be sitting on the floor. This discourages students from attending classes every day. Eventually, students may resort to dropout.

j. Lack of teachers' dedication

It was also learnt during the research study that teachers are not dedicated to their work. It was reported that teachers usually report late for work: they have a tendency of knocking off earlier than the recommended time, such that they just knock off even before it is time as long as they feel like they are tired.

5.2.1 More influential factors in determining school dropout

All in all, the more influential factors in their rank as suggested by the respondents include repetition, negative comments, sexual harassment, punishments, lack of female teachers in senior classes, Life skills, lack of teachers' dedication, inadequate classrooms and desks, and finally contraceptives.

5.2.2 How to mitigate school dropout at school level

Regarding the strategies on how to mitigate against school dropout at school level, the participants suggested the following: Teachers who propose girls must be punished to deter the would be offenders. During the study it was learnt that girls are proposed by male teachers. It was learnt that if they refuse, they are given punishments without breaking any school rules. The contraceptives act as an invitation for girls to start indulging in promiscuous behavior. This immoral behavior results in girls absconding classes, not paying attention in classes and finally dropping out of school altogether. Therefore, this act must be discouraged. Construction of school blocks to minimize or eradicate the tendency of pupils learning under trees. In addition, the provision of desks for use by pupils in senior classes can greatly assist to attract and retain girls in schools. A conducive learning environment with school blocks and desks can greatly motivate girls to continue learning instead of dropping out of school due to sitting on the floor and under the trees. Female teachers must teach in senior classes so that girls can talk to them freely. The research discovered that all senior classes were being taught by male teachers despite the availability of female teachers.

It was learnt during the study that girls are not comfortable with the way the subject is handled, especially when it comes to life skills. Therefore, teachers have to be trained on how to handle such a subject.

5.3 Conclusion

The present study was carried out to find school related factors affecting girls' dropout rates in senior classes at primary school level. The results have shown that three interdependent factors, namely, the teachers, the nature of the school environment and

the school rules and practices play a role in contributing to school dropout. For instance, if male teachers sexually harass girls instead of encouraging them to work hard or when girls are given tough punishments for minor offences. These factors make the school not conducive to sustain girls up to the last grade, consequently, they dropout thereby failing to realize their full potential.

The education system has made tremendous improvements in increasing enrollments in schools through various policies which are in favour of girls' education. However, greater efforts are required that will help to keep the girls in schools to reduce dropout rates. Therefore, it is important to adopt policies that will make the schools learner friendly and a conducive environment for girls to complete the full primary school cycle, otherwise a large number of girls will continue to dropout.

5.4 Recommendations of the study

The problem of girls' dropout in Machinga rural is a serious one. If left unattended to, the situation will worsen. Therefore, based on the research findings, the study has the following recommendations:

- i. Schools should adopt policies that will make the learning environment learner friendly. Girls have to feel that they are accepted. It was found that the schools are not friendly enough to girls, for instance, in terms of harassment and comments they get especially from male teachers, which are so negative in nature.
- ii. The schools should have enough classroom blocks and desks. The research findings show that because the schools did not have enough school blocks and desks, learners were not comfortable sitting on the floor and learning under the tree.

- iii. Teachers should be trained on how to handle and teach Life skills. This is because teachers show lack of skills on how to deliver the content of the subject.
- iv. Punishments given to learners should be appropriate. Similarly, proper timing should be observed when administering such punishments as some learners miss lessons if such punishments are done when lessons are in progress.
- v. Leaders should make sure that female teachers are assigned to both junior and senior classes as it was discovered that female teachers were in junior classes only while learners in senior classes need female teachers to confide in.
- vi. Schools should discourage provision of contraceptives to learners. It was discovered during the study that the distribution of contraceptives act as an invitation for girls to start indulging in promiscuous behavior.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

Further research on the causes of learner dropout should be conducted to determine the underlying causes of learner dropout. The present study was limited to two schools in Machinga rural. It may be necessary to carry out another research in Machinga urban in order to compare the causes of girls' dropout.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: School Information Questionnaire

1. School.....
2. District.....
3. Number of teachers.....Males.....Females.....
4. Number of students.....Boys.....Girls.....
5. Number of classrooms.....
6. Number of girls' toilets.....
7. Water source.....

Teacher information

Number	Sex	Age	Experience	Professional Qualification	Std Teaching
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					

Furniture

Standard	Venue of learning	Number of desks
6		
7		
8		

3. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS (girls' admission, repetition and dropout records for the years 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015)

Year	Std 6	Std 7	Std 8
2012			
2013			
2014			
2015			

APPENDIX II: Guidelines for Focus Group Discussions With different participants

GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH GIRLS IN STANDARDS 6, 7 AND 8

- Views on experiences of girls when they are in school, in terms of: punishments, comments from male and female teachers, treatment from male and female teachers, sexual harassment.
- Views on factors that surround girls' dropout in senior classes at primary school level. What impact do these have on girls?
- Views on factors which are more influential in determining girls drop out
- Views on ways in which the factors influence girls to drop out of school
- Views on what can be done to mitigate against girls' dropout levels at school level

GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH DROP- OUTS

- Views on experiences of girls when they are in school, in terms of: punishments, comments from male and female teachers, treatment from male and female teachers, sexual harassment.
- Views on factors that surround girls' dropout in senior classes at primary school level. What impact do these have on girls?
- Views on factors which are more influential in determining girls drop out
- Views on ways in which the factors influence girls to drop out of school
- Views on what can be done to mitigate against girls' dropout levels at school level

GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH TEACHERS

- Views on experiences of girls when they are in school, in terms of: punishments, comments from male and female teachers, treatment from male and female teachers, sexual harassment.
- Views on factors that surround girls' dropout in senior classes at primary school level. What impact do these have on girls?
- Views on factors which are more influential in determining girls drop out
- Views on ways in which the factors influence girls to drop out of school
- Views on what can be done to mitigate against girls' dropout levels at school level

GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH PARENTS

- Views on experiences of girls when they are in school, in terms of: punishments, comments from male and female teachers, treatment from male and female teachers, sexual harassment.
- Views on factors that surround girls' dropout in senior classes at primary school level. What impact do these have on girls?
- Views on factors which are more influential in determining girls drop out
- Views on ways in which the factors influence girls to drop out of school
- Views on what can be done to mitigate against girls' dropout levels at school level

GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH SCHOOL

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- Views on experiences of girls when they are in school, in terms of: punishments, comments from male and female teachers, treatment from male and female teachers, sexual harassment.
- Views on factors that surround girls' dropout in senior classes at primary school level. What impact do these have on girls?
- Views on factors which are more influential in determining girls drop out
- Views on ways in which the factors influence girls to drop out of school
- Views on what can be done to mitigate against girls' dropout levels at school level