

**PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PRACTICES OF USING GROUP WORK
METHOD IN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES**

MASTER OF EDUCATION (PRIMARY) THESIS

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**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

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MASTER OF EDUCATION (PRIMARY) THESIS

By

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**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
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DECLARATION

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

Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nyapwala for their care and encouragement for me to go to school. This is also extended to my Wife, Irine Nyapwala, Brother, Wilfred Nyapwala and Sister, Mrs. Elius, for their support in my academic endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

From 2001, the government of Malawi revised the Primary school curriculum through the 'Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform'. Group work method was planned in the Social and Environmental Sciences (SES) curriculum to be used persistently as opposed to traditional teacher-centred methods. The purpose of the study was to investigate primary school teachers' practices of using group work method when teaching SES. This study was informed by Bourdieu's social field theory as theoretical framework. This study used a qualitative approach and phenomenological research design. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews, lesson observation and document analysis. Eight standard eight primary school teachers of SES were purposively sampled. Data was analysed using a qualitative thematic approach. The study results show that teachers' practices on the use of group work method involve formation of groups based on size, mixed gender and mixed ability. The practices also involved development of group tasks and organisation of group work activities in the lesson. The teachers' practices were hindered by limited instructional resources, limited knowledge, English as a medium of instruction and high stakes testing. The results confirm that effective teachers' practices on group work in SES have the potential to develop citizenship and democratic skills in learners. It can be concluded that teachers' practices on the use of group work in SES were not done effectively due to deficient knowledge to offset the challenges that affect the use of the method. It can be recommended that teachers should undergo in service training on the use of group work method and improvisation of instructional resources.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASSP	African Social Studies Programme
MANEB	Malawi National Examinations Board
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCSS	National Council for Social Studies
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PIF	Policy Investment Framework
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
TALULAR	Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources
SES	Social and Environmental Sciences

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Chapter overview

This chapter provides the context for this study. This study investigated teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences in Malawi primary schools. The first part of this chapter presents a brief background information of Social and Environmental Sciences and the use of group work method. The chapter further presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of study, research questions and the significance of the study.

1.1 Background of Social and Environmental Sciences

Social Studies provides knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values which enable the youth to be good citizens (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995). Quartey (1984) describes the subject as a study that equips the youth with tools necessary in solving personal and community related problems. The subject can also be defined as an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities that promote civic competence and help young people to develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens of a culturally diverse and democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1992).

Social and Environmental Sciences is one of the subjects which is offered to Malawi learners since the colonial era. In the past, the subject was offered as ‘the social studies’ which comprised of Geography, History and Civics and was taught using teacher-centred methods mainly. However, in 2001, as a result of the new direction set by the Policy Investment Framework (PIF), the government of Malawi started the revision of curriculum for primary schools through the ‘Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR)’. This was to make the curriculum more relevant to the learners by allowing them to take a central position in the learning process (MOE, 2003). This embraced a shift from teacher-centered to participatory methods of teaching and learning (Mizrachi, Padilla, & Susuwele-Banda, 2010). The new curriculum followed ‘Outcome Based Education (OBE) model’ (MIE, 2009). OBE defines clearly what learners are to learn and measures their progress based on the actual achievement (MIE, 2009). The new curriculum was introduced in primary schools in January of 2007, beginning with Standard1, and by 2010 the curriculum was rolled into all the eight Standards of the primary school (Mizrachi et al., 2010).

Following the introduction of the PCAR, what was formerly known as ‘Social Studies’ became known as ‘Social and Environmental Sciences’ in order to put emphasis on changing environmental issues as the country depends on natural resources for livelihood (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). Malawi children have to learn from the onset that proper utilisation and conservation of natural resources is important for their development.

Just like the other subjects and learning areas, Social and Environmental Sciences teaching methods shifted from teacher-centred to participatory teaching and learning approaches through the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). One of the teaching and learning methods which is recurrent in the curriculum is group work method (MIE, 2009). This is so because the subject promotes the process of living and working together, and use of the environment to meet basic human needs as good citizens (Dube, 2009).

In addition, Social and Environmental Sciences is the only subject within the school curriculum entrusted with studying societal and contemporary issues (NCSS, 1992). This therefore, requires teachers to use teaching and learning methods that are cognisant of the dynamism of the social environment that their students come from (Mautle, 2000; Mhlauli, 2010). Teachers are confronted with the challenge to use methods of teaching that are in line with the learning styles and cultures of the students they teach (Mhlauli, 2010). Thus, group work method is a catalyst to equip the learners with such citizenship skills of working together peacefully (Ornstein and Lasley, 2000).

Jeremiah (2013) contends that group work is a form of co-operative learning in which students learn in a team. Mtunda and Safuli (1986) describe group work method as a teaching method where the teacher organises pupils in working groups in order to participate in a learning activity. Group work involves persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by the other (Mintah, 2014). Mintah (2014) further contends that group work method of teaching can

be described as putting learners into smaller groups to discuss specific issues or work on specific task in order to achieve some interdependent goal; such as increased understanding, coordination of activities, or a solution to a shared problem. Ornstein and Lasley II (2000) opine that dividing students into groups provides an opportunity for students to become more active in learning, and for teachers to monitor students' progress better.

Group work helps to develop democratic mindset in the sense that it encourages participation of all members. This is in line with the goal of citizenship, which is active participation in the society in order to achieve interdependent goals (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Participation is a major principle of democracy and good citizenry (MoEST, 2010). Citizens in a democracy are required to participate in activities of government responsibly. Learners of different characteristics and from different backgrounds learn to work together during group work. They learn to put behind their differences in order to work to achieve a common goal. Learners learn to respect each other's views during group work which is a requirement in a democracy. This, as a result, nurtures tolerance in learners. Group work also provides with learners the opportunity to develop communication, interpersonal, leadership, negotiation, planning, self-awareness, self-confidence, and listening skills which are also the parameters of good citizenry (Learning and Information Services, 2014). Malcolm (1997) asserts that learners can gain experience about democratic principles and processes by practising them in the classroom through cooperative group work. Active and participatory methods of teaching and learning like group work leads to new opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills

for practising democracy (Duerr & Martins, 2000). This is in tandem with Malawi's experiment with political democratization as learners will start practicing democracy at a tender age. It is in the light of this understanding that this study explored teachers' practices of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

1.2 Motivation for the study

The decision to research this topic arose from two main factors. Firstly, the researcher has taught Social and Environmental Sciences both at primary school and Teacher Training College levels and has experiences of the use group work method. Secondly, as a teacher trainer, the researcher has observed that student teachers who are mentored by the qualified primary school teachers during Teaching Practice, face a number of challenges when using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. This prompted the researcher to desire to explore teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES.

1.3 Statement of the problem

To begin with, little is known as regards to teachers' practices of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences in Malawi. The little that is known is mostly on the challenges faced when using group work method in general (CERT, 2015; Chipshiko & Shawa; Mizrahi et al., 2010). Studies focusing purely on teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences are scarce (MIE, 2009). However, literature in Malawi primary Social and Environmental Sciences encourages the use of participatory methods as opposed to the traditional teacher-centred

methods in the process of teaching and learning (MIE, 2009). One of the participatory methods that is recurrent in Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum is group work (MIE, 2009). However, Mizrachi et al. (2010) argue that this paradigm shift can be difficult to put into practice as teachers who have been using lecture method for years can find using participatory methods burdensome. Similarly, new teachers, who were taught using rote-learning- teacher-centered methods, may find it difficult to put the new methods into practice. Despite this, Nyirenda (2005) contends that there are not many studies that have investigated teachers on issues of participatory classroom practices, and group work is one of such participatory methods. To date, little is known as regards teachers' practices on the use of group work method in teaching Social and Environmental Sciences in Malawi primary schools.

In addition, curriculum developers persistently suggested group work method for the Social and Environmental sciences curriculum (MIE, 2009) due to the perceived benefits of the method when used in the subject. However, Mchazime (2005) and Mhango (2008) observed that many African countries put much effort in the development of curricula, but do very little in ensuring their effective implementation. Mizrachi et al. (2010) also noted that although policies have been put in place to support the use of participatory methods (which includes group work) in the curriculum, there is a mismatch between policy and practice. Bearing in mind these observations, there was need to study teachers' practices of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate primary school teachers' practices of using group work method when teaching Social and Environmental Sciences.

1.5 Research questions

The main research question of this study was:

What are Primary school teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences?

The specific research questions were:

- How do primary school teachers conduct group work method in teaching Social and Environmental Sciences?
- What are the opportunities when using group work method effectively in teaching Social and Environmental Sciences for learners?
- What challenges do primary school teachers encounter when using group work method in teaching Social and Environmental sciences?

1.6 Significance of the study

The results of this study would contribute to existing literature regarding the use of group work method in the teaching and learning of Social and Environmental Sciences. Most studies focus on learner-centred methods in general (CERT, 2015; Chiphiko & Shawa, Mizrachi et al., 2010). Studies focusing purely on group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences are scarce.

In addition, the findings and recommendations of this study would inform educators and education stake holders on best ways to support the education system with technical or material assistance to improve teaching of Social and Environmental Sciences through the use of group work method.

Furthermore, this study would serve as a catalyst for increased understanding of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences teaching. This eventually would serve as a basis for comprehensive investigation to redress any problems in the use of group work method in the teaching and learning of Social and environmental sciences in primary schools.

1.7 Definition of operational terms

This study used a number of operational terms and their definitions are as follows:

Additive tasks: Additive tasks refer to group work where each additional group member can add something to the output (Watkins, 2012).

Conjunctive tasks: Such tasks are those where each group member has to contribute and as a result more group learning takes place (Watkins, 2012).

Disjunctive tasks: Disjunctive tasks are those that only need one knowledgeable group member to be capable of achieving the task (Watkins, 2012).

Free riding: Free riding is where group members reduce their effort because their individual contribution seems to have little impact on group performance (Watkins, 2012).

Köhler effect: This occurs when weaker members work harder than they would do individually in order to avoid being responsible for a weak group performance (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012).

Social loafing: Social loafing occurs if group members reduce their effort due to the fact that their individual contribution to the group product is not identifiable (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012).

Ringelmann effect: This is where the average performance of individual group members decrease with increasing group size (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012).

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in five chapters. The first chapter presents the background of this study, motivation for the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study and the chapter summary. The second chapter is literature review which examines related literature on the topic. Finally the chapter presents the theoretical framework that informs this study. The third chapter presents the research design and methodology. The fourth chapter is a presentation and discussion of the study findings. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusions drawn from the study, implications, recommendations and areas for further study.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided the back ground of Social and Environmental Sciences and the use of group work method. This introductory chapter has also presented the motivation for the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions that guided the study. The significance of this study is also highlighted in this chapter. The next chapter is a review of literature that has relevance to this current study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a review of related literature that reflects the current study. This chapter is divided into sections that look at aspects pertaining to the use of group work in Social and Environmental Sciences. The first part looks at the meaning and development of Social and Environmental Sciences. This part also sheds light on the relationship of Social and Environmental Sciences with group work method. The second part looks at how group work is conducted. The third part dwells at the opportunities that are associated with the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. The fourth part reviews the challenges associated with the use of group work method. The last section discusses Bourdieu's thinking tools as a theoretical framework that informs this study.

2.1 Understanding Social and Environmental Sciences

This subsection presents the definition and origin of Social Studies, development of Social Studies in Africa and Malawi, and the relevance of group work method in the teaching and learning of Social and Environmental Sciences.

2.1.1 Definition of Social studies

Social Studies is defined differently by different authors but its rationale still remains universally the same which is that of developing good citizens. Social Studies is the systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology (NCSS, 2010). While definitions of the subject may differ and the type of good citizen may also vary according to the perspectives of 'good citizen' held by different nations and peoples of the world. Dube (2009) contends that Social Studies dwells on the study of human beings, their interaction with the environment in the past and present, with due consideration of the future. Frost and Rowland (1969) define Social Studies as studies of human relationship; human to human, human to institutions, human to physical environment and human to value systems. This implies that the subject promotes the process of living and working together, and use of the environment to meet basic human needs. Quartey (1984) describes the subject as a study that equips the youth with tools necessary in solving personal and community related problems.

Social Studies is also defined as an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities in order to promote civic competence and help young people to develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens of culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1992, 2010). Thus Social Studies provides knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values which enable the youth to be good citizens (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995). This implies that Social Studies focuses at citizenship education, education for cultural integration, environmental protection and sustainable

living. Citizenship entails working and doing things together while ensuring that there is tolerance and understanding which is mostly planted in learners through group work tasks.

2.1.2 The origin of Social and Environmental Sciences

The United States of America is the country from which Social Studies originated (NCSS, 1992, 2010). It started there in the early 1900 as a remedy to social and political problems (Obebe, 1990). By 1921, the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) was formed. The NCSS has since then been playing prominent roles in the development and wider acceptance of Social studies across the world. Events in the world scene, such as the Russian launching of Sputnik (1957) and American internal social problems of the 1960s gave rise to the “New Social Studies” in the 1960s (NCSS, 1992). Curriculum materials of the new Social Studies teach students methods of inquiry for generating knowledge. Learners are taught Social and Environmental Sciences in ways that make learning active, interactive, hands on and engaging. These methods nowadays are popularly known as participatory approaches. These methods stemmed from the works of progressive educators such as John Dewey in the 1930’s who encouraged teachers to promote activity-based learning built on learners’ interests in Social Studies. Dewey maintained that child learning and teaching activities should begin with the familiar experiences of daily life (Dewey, 1966).

Another powerful influence on the child-centered instructional approach in Social Studies came in the 1960s with the work of Jerome Bruner (Mindes, 2005). With the advocacy of

Bruner, inquiry-based teaching became a central instructional strategy for Social and Environmental Sciences. Bruner stressed the doing of Social science in the learning process (Mindes, 2005). For example, students should answer complex questions through investigation and critical thinking (Mindes, 2005; Wayne Ross, 2001; Zarrillo, 2004) which can best be done as learners work in small groups. Ross (2001) contends that Social studies teaching and learning should be in the form of activities that require learners to pose and analyse problems in the process of understanding and transforming their world. Social and Environmental Sciences teaching and learning should not be about passively absorbing someone else's conception of the world, but rather it should be about creating a personally meaningful understanding of the way the world is and how it can be transformed (Ross, 2001). Social Studies teaching and learning should inquire the taken-for-granted elements in our everyday experience (Ross, 2001). Ornstein and Lasley II (2000) opines that dividing students into groups provide an opportunity for active learning based on every day experience.

2.1.3 Development of Social studies in Africa

It is interesting to note that Social Studies is a much debated subject even in Africa. However, the good thing is that all point to one thing, that is, the preparation of good and responsible citizens. Merryfield (1986), in her study of some selected African nations, found that there was a problem of the definition of Social Studies and lack of instructional materials in schools. In her study in Malawi, Kenya and Nigeria, Merryfield (1986) observed that teachers and teacher educators were not clear about the meaning of Social studies and could not differentiate it from the subjects it replaced. However,

Colonial education in Africa had some aspects of Social Studies. Social Studies was taught as independent subjects such as Civics, History, Geography and Government (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). The content of these subjects mainly served to achieve the goals of the colonial masters. The methods for teaching were mainly teacher-centred. This therefore called for reforms in the Social Studies curriculum more especially for the curriculum to be Africanised.

After gaining independence, Social Studies curriculum was changed to reflect the views and interests of Africans. Africanisation in terms of an African-centered education refers to instruction that is developed from and centered on African peoples' experiences, thought, and environment (Mhlauli, 2010). The objectives, content, methods and resources were modified to reflect the content, values and attitudes as well as the skills of the African people (NCSS, 1992). A study done by Merryfield and Tlou (1995) revealed that the Primary Social studies curriculum in Malawi, Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe were revised to reflect their culture, language, literature and traditions. For example in Botswana the move towards Afrocentric Social studies included among others developing a strong moral code of behavior that is compatible with the ethics and traditions of the citizens of the country. Similarly, Social studies curriculum in Kenya was revised to reflect the country's economic development, cultural heritage, and national political unity. Likewise, the primary curriculum of Zimbabwe focused on the nation, her history and culture. In Nigeria, the Africanised curriculum concentrated on the local community, family, culture, health and economic well-being (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995).

2.1.4 Development of Social and Environmental Sciences in Malawi

During the colonial era Social studies was taught as History, Geography and Civics (ASESP, 1994; Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). The content was biased towards the glory of the western world, ignoring the Malawian cultures (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). It was until the paradigm shift of Africanising Social Studies was effected that the curriculum was revised to emphasise on teaching about Malawi and its neighbors as opposed to non-African content. However, even though such revisions were taken into account, after the country's independence in 1964, Social studies was still taught as Geography in standards one to six, History in standards three to six and Civics in standards five to six using teacher centred methods (Merryfield & Tlou, 1995).

The first major revision of the Social studies curriculum took place in 1991, where for the first time; Geography, History and Civics were integrated into one subject (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). Social studies subject was taught from standards three to eight. It was known as 'General Studies' from standards one to four, and 'Social Studies' from standards five to eight. The main methods of teaching were a combination of teacher-centred and active learning pedagogies (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000).

Another major revision of the Social studies curriculum took place in 1998 with the purpose of incorporating the emerging issues which arose when Malawi changed its political system from single party to multi-party rule. From 2001, the Ministry of education embarked on making national education programs more reflective of changing socioeconomic and political realities and making it interesting to the learners by allowing

them to take a central position in the learning process (MOE, 2003). Social studies became known as ‘Social and Environmental Sciences’ in order to put emphasis on changing environmental issues (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). The curriculum put its emphasis on national heritage through knowledge and respect of national symbols, participatory democracy, care of the environment, effective citizenship and maintenance of high social and moral standards (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). In an effort to improve the quality of primary education in Malawi, Social and Environmental Sciences approaches shifted from teacher-centred to participatory ones through the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR)(Mizrachi et al., 2010). One of the participatory approaches that is given much prominence in the curriculum is group work.

2.1.5 Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum and the relevance of group work

The content for Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum is organized based on the learning theory called the expanding horizon or expanding environments (Tlou & Kabwila, 2000). The expanding horizon theory entails that as children grow, their views of the world or environment expand accordingly, and hence are able to handle more complex tasks as they grow older. Children start learning objects and ideas with which they are already familiar with before moving on to remote and less familiar ones (Oats, 2014).

The use of the expanding horizon approach is in line with one of the tenets of group work which is the use of learners’ previous knowledge or experiences to construct knowledge.

For instance, Tlou and Kabwila (2000) contend that Social studies topics in Malawi are organised into strands that cut across all standards, from standards 1 to 8. The topics include: past and present events, population, physical environment, resource management, civic rights and responsibilities, social, cultural and ethical environments, emerging issues such as; gender, HIV and AIDS, drugs, alcohol, substance use and abuse, and safety. A close study of the themes by Tlou and Kabwila (2000) reveals that it is indeed a spiral curriculum, developed using the educational theory of expanding horizons. This implies that learners base their group discussions on earlier experiences of the same topic. The curriculum is designed in such a way that group work method should be conducted in almost each and every lesson.

2.2 How to conduct group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences

Group work in Social and Environmental Sciences is conducted by taking into account group composition, group tasks, lesson planning and group work organisation (MIE, 2009).

2.2.1 Group size

The size of the groups affects the effectiveness of group work. Large group size reduces the participation and performance of group members. Large group size also reduces the cooperation of group members. Watkins (2012) contends that group size is an important variable in group design, as it affects outcomes in terms of performance and practicability. Davies (2009) contends that there is an inverse relationship between the size of a group and the magnitude of a group member's individual contribution to the

accomplishment of the task. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998) support group sizes of four to five students as larger groups restrict members' participation and so provide less opportunities for them to increase their skills. Thus, group size has an effect on individual performance, popularly known as the "ringelmann effect" (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012). Ringelmann effect has an implication on the performance of individual group members as their participation decreases with increasing group size' (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012). Burke (2011) contends that it is difficult to be a loafer in a small group.

In addition, cooperation among group members decreases with increasing group size. Watkins (2012) asserts that smaller groups have process advantages over larger ones in terms of greater cohesion, less tension and increased motivation to co-operate. In a review of research on small groups generally, Levine and Moreland (1990) observe that learners who belong to larger groups are less satisfied, participate less often, and are less likely to cooperate with one another. The studies were more general and were not focused in Social and Environmental Sciences, hence the need for this study. However, other studies have found that the small group size should be accompanied with teaching the learners how they can cooperate. For instance, an Australian study investigated the effects of cooperative learning on 223 Grade 9 students as they worked on Mathematics problem-solving activities in small groups. The study found that the students in the structured groups where students were taught how to collaborate with each other and worked regularly in groups were more willing to help and promote each other's learning than the students in the unstructured groups where students were simply placed in groups on an 'ad hoc' basis and expected to work together (Gillies, 2004). The study was carried

in Mathematics but this current one is in SES to focus on teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method.

2.2.2 Homogeneity and heterogeneity in group composition

Apart from ensuring recommended group size, the groups should comprise learners of different characteristics in order to produce a supportive and successful learning environment for knowledge construction. If group work is to be effective, pupils must be able to work in a socially inclusive manner with all other members of their class (Blatchford, Kutnick, & Bainesdon, 2007). Firstly, the groups should not be dominated by same-gender and friendship preference (Blatchford, Galton, Kutnick, & Baines, 2005; Kutnick, Sebba, Blatchford, Galton, & Thorp, 2005). For instance, Webb (1984) compared the interaction and achievement of 77 grades 7 and 8 students on Mathematics activities for 2 weeks in three kinds of mixed-gender groups: two girls and two boys, several girls and one boy, and several boys and one girl. Webb (1984) found that girls and boys in the balanced-sex group showed similar patterns of interaction and similar amounts of learning. By contrast, there was breakdown of interaction, for instance in the majority-girls groups, the girls directed most of their requests for help to the boy, but he tended not to respond appropriately to their requests while in the majority-boys groups, the boys simply ignored the girl.

However, Hughes (2007) contends that single-sex groups gives students the opportunity to learn in an environment free from other-sex distractions. By separating the sexes, teachers have a better chance of meeting the learning needs of boys and girls (Swain &

Harvey, 2002). This reflects the study by Boaler (1997) titled 'impact of different forms of grouping on individuals according to gender' which revealed that girls prefer co-operative, and supportive group work environments and boys work well in competitive environments.

In addition, heterogeneous groups in terms of ability and performance of learners are preferred to homogenous ones. High, medium and low achievers assist each other when they are mixed in a group. Watkins (2012) recommends that learners with high and low characteristics of attributes such as; 'confidence, ability, motivation and knowledge' should be mixed in a group. The intention is that learners with more of a favourable characteristic can help influence their friends with less of that characteristic. In a review of research by Wilkinson and Fung (2002) on grouping of students by mixed ability and gender, the results indicated heightened group interactions and discourse among students that led to cognitive restructuring, cognitive rehearsal, problem solving, and other forms of higher-level thinking. It was observed further that students of lower and higher ability benefited more because they form a teacher-learner relationship (Wilkinson & Fung, 2002).

Equally important is that some scholars recommend moderate differences between group members' individual capabilities. The argument is that if the group members are aware of these differences, that helps to increase the Köhler effect which occurs when weaker members work harder than they would do individually in order to avoid being responsible for a weak group performance (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012).

By contrast, same ability groups also promote learning. For instance, in a fieldwork study in selected schools in Kampala by Altinyelken (2010), it was observed that although the curriculum encouraged mixed ability groups, very few teachers preferred to have students in mixed ability groups since they believed that students can cooperate better if their achievement level is more or less the same. The teachers were of the view that when high-achievers were grouped with low achievers, they were not challenged enough, and they also got distracted and performed worse over time and yet, when they were seated with students who performed well, they were more motivated and inspired. Teachers also believed that grouping students according to ability simplified their own work and helped them to work more effectively with students. Paradoxically, when low performing students were mixed with those who performed well, they were more motivated and inspired (Altinyelken, 2010). However, the study was carried in different subjects and grade levels and this study focuses specifically on teachers' practices of the use of group work in Social and Environmental Sciences and standard 8 in particular.

2.2.3 Task complexity

Studies have indicated that social loafing occurs more often in easy tasks as lack of challenge and stimulation negates the likelihood of unique contributions from group members (Davies, 2009). Davies (2009) observes that group work tasks should be made stimulating and complex, but as far as possible measurable in terms of unambiguous aims and objectives. There are different types of tasks which include among others: disjunctive, conjunctive, and additive group tasks. Disjunctive tasks can be achieved by only one successful person in a group (Davies, 2009; Watkins, 2012). They are unsuitable

for group work assessment exercises in the sense that the productivity of the group depends on the productivity of the performance of the best group member (Davies, 2009; Ruel, Bastiaans, & Nauta, 2003). Consequently, they foster and encourage ‘freeriding and social loafing’ (Davies, 2009; Watkins, 2012).

By contrast, conjunctive tasks require each member to contribute to an assessed task (Ruel et al., 2003). Whereas in a disjunctive task one successful member can be enough to solve the task, a conjunctive task requires all group members to be successful for the group to solve the given task (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012). However, additive tasks require each member of the group to add something to the task. That is, there are inputs from each group member forming a composite whole. They are the best kind of tasks to minimise free-riding as they make individual contributions to be inevitable (Davies, 2009).

For instance, in a review of literature on the use of group work as a form of assessment in tertiary institutions, Davies (2009) found that one way of solving the problem of social loafing and free-riding is to carefully consider the nature of the task given to students and to reward the effort of groups as well as reward the work of individuals. Similarly, team research by Revere, Elden, and Bartsch (2008) in Georgia, illuminates that group activities aimed at maximising positive and individual accountability act as a catalyst to the exhibition of low levels of social loafing and high levels of individual member responsibility. Engelbrecht (2000) points out that group tasks must include both goals for the whole group and individual responsibility if the progress of group work is to be

effective. These studies were conducted across different subjects but not in SES and hence the need to study teachers' practices of the use of these tasks in Social and Environmental Sciences.

2.2.4 Lesson preparation for group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences

Mtunda and Safuli (1986) contend that effective implementation of group work method require proper preparation of lessons. In a study which investigated how second year mathematics student teachers at Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa prepare and present their lesson, Ramaligela (2012) observed that the way student teachers prepare their lessons affect classroom presentation. The student teachers lacked techniques and ability to design a lesson plan that can be useful in their teaching which affected the implementation of their lesson plan into real-life classroom (Ramaligela, 2012). This implies that it is deplorable for teachers go to class without thorough preparation. The study was conducted in Mathematics and this one focuses in Social and Environmental Sciences.

Similarly, an investigation of how primary school teachers in Malawi plan and implement Social studies lessons for the preparation of active participatory citizens in a democratic society reveal that most Social studies teachers do not plan their work adequately. This, therefore, becomes a barrier to the use of participatory approaches, group work inclusive in the classroom (Mhango, 2008). Therefore, lack of proper planning is also attributable to the ineffective use of group work method in SES. However, the study was conducted

to investigate how primary school teachers in Malawi plan and implement Social Studies lessons for the preparation of active participatory citizens in a democratic society while this current study focuses on teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES.

2.2.5 Organisation of group work in the classroom

Erickson, Peters, and Strommer (2006) assert that once groups have been formed, learners are given the group task and then do discussions in the groups. Mtunda and Safuli (1986) advise that as the learners are working in the groups, the teacher should move around to check the progress and at the same time encourage and help those facing some difficulties. After this, the learners are asked to present their work and finally the group activity is evaluated and consolidated (Erickson et al., 2006).

Relatedly, Mtitu (2014) carried out a qualitative study using multiple case study design titled 'learner-centred teaching in Tanzania: Geography teachers' perceptions and experiences'. The sample of the study was nine purposively selected Geography teachers. One of the findings of this study was that the teacher facilitated group work by assigning each of the groups a different sub-topic to discuss. The teacher then had to make group follow ups. After ten minutes of discussion, the teacher asked each group to present what they observed and discussed. The teacher then made a summary of the lesson using a question and answer technique. The teacher wrote students' responses on the chalk board when the responses were thought to be correct. The study was conducted in Geography, but the current study focuses on teachers' practices of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

Similarly, in a case study of 27 senior secondary school students as research participants in Botswana to find out the extent to which learner-centered approach was being implemented. Yandila, Komane, and Moganane (2002) found that group work was conducted in such a way that students were asked to work in groups of 3-8 in a laboratory. At the end of the practical work, one member of each group reported the results and made conclusions of their experiments in front of the class (Yandila et al., 2002). At the end of the practical work, the teacher or students summarized the lesson (Yandila et al., 2002). However, the study was carried at a secondary school level but the current study is carried in primary schools. The study targeted students but in the current one, the participants are teachers and the focus is on their practices regarding the use of group work method in SES.

In addition, when organising group work the teacher should ensure sound management of the class. For instance, Mintah (2014) carried out an action research titled ‘using group work method of teaching to address the problem of large class size in business studies’ using mixed method approach. Mintah (2014) found that to conduct group work method effectively, there should be good class management, monitoring and control on top of proper planning and preparation. In addition clear instructions to students as to what to do and when to do them must be observed at all times during the lesson. Mintah (2014) further found that enough time should be given for students to finish the given task. The study is partly different from this current study because it was conducted in a business studies class while this one is in Social and Environmental Sciences. In addition, the study used mixed method approach while this current study is purely qualitative.

Furthermore, Admore (2011) states that the teacher must constantly check and talk to the learners in order to control noise during group work. Research studies carried out by Freiberg and Driscoll (2000) found that the teacher should talk to the learners on how to do group work and organise their work. The teacher should be active and be involved all the time during group work (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). It is imperative that the teacher moves around and listens to the discussion of the various groups (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). In same vein, Shuter and shooter (2005) opine that informal conversations with the learners in the groups can help them to be task-focused and reminding time limits for the activities, but care should be taken to avoid unnecessary interruptions.

2.3 Opportunities in the use of group work method

Research indicates that if group work is conducted well it brings a number of opportunities. It promotes the performance of learners. Learners also become active in the learning process. It equips learners with essential skills for the development responsible citizenry. It also increases students' chances of being employed in future. In line to these opportunities, learners prefer Social and Environmental Sciences lessons that make use of group work method (Dube, 2009).

Firstly, group work promotes the performance of learners. There was a study which was carried out in Abakaliki metropolis of Ebonyi State, Nigeria to investigate learners' preference of instructional methods used in teaching and learning of Social studies. Questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection and data were analysed using simple percentage. The results of the study showed that 89% preferred cooperative

methods such as group work in teaching and learning of Social and Environmental Sciences because it promotes learning (Nnamani & Oyibe, 2014). In this study, learners were the participants while in the current study, it was teachers who were the participants.

Similarly, a survey was conducted by Jeremiah (2013) in Botswana to identify strategies teachers use to prepare Junior certificate students for final examinations in Social studies. A questionnaire was used to collect data. The results of the study indicate that most teachers (62.5%) in the sample use group work to prepare their students for final examinations because the method contributed to the production of desired results. The study by Jeremiah is closer to the current study because it focused on Social Studies. However, the study did not fully focus on teachers' practices of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

Secondly, group work also creates dialogue in the teaching and learning process. Mtunda and Safuli (1986) observe that group work method offers an opportunity for the pupils to share ideas, experiences and interact with one another. For instance, Chidi (2013) investigated 'methods and materials for teaching Religious education in Adult education in Enugu state' using a descriptive survey design and a sample of Adult education Religious teachers. The findings reveal that one of the methods adopted in Religious education in 'Adult education' is group work discussion because it helps to create dialogue. Chidi (2013) further noted that dialogue ensures that adult learners are active participants in the learning process and empowered to understand and take a step to transform their world. The study by Chidi (2013) is closer to the current study because it

also investigated the importance of group work method in Religious Education which is also a component of Social Studies. However, the study focused on Adult education while the current one is on primary school level. Hence, the need to find out if teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES at primary school level can help to create dialogue.

Likewise, Mkhize (1999) carried out a research study titled "investigating the role of cooperative group work in learner achievement in Mathematics". The results of the study revealed that students preferred cooperative group work because they didn't experience difficulties in communication and understanding their teachers. Students had the freedom to ask questions and express themselves. Mkhize (1999) further observed that through the use of cooperative group work teachers saved the unproductive time spent on teaching without any learning taking place. Hence, there is need to investigate if the opportunities that were observed through the use of group work method in Mathematics can also be found if teachers' practices on the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences are effective.

Similarly, Lee (2014) conducted a research study by conducting interviews with elementary teachers in Ontario to attempt to find out ways in which group work benefits Grade 1 and 2 English language learners in the mainstream classroom. From this research, it was found that group work increase learners' social, oral, and intellectual skills. It was also observed that group work provides all learners with the opportunity to collaborate and utilize each other's knowledge and experience to find solutions and solve

problems (Lee, 2014). Moreover, through group work, it was noted that young learners develop and strengthen relationships that extend beyond the classroom (Lee, 2014). However, the study was conducted on English language learners while this one was on Social and Environmental Sciences teachers. In addition, this study was carried in a developed country; hence the need to find if teachers' practices on the use of group work method in Malawi could also increase learners' social, oral, and intellectual skills.

Furthermore, group work is a catalyst to active participation and learning for efficacy. Tina and Adewale (2015) conducted a research study in Nigeria titled 'group dynamic concepts in Social studies as correlates of moral values and national unity in Nigeria' using the population sample of 150 Junior secondary school students randomly selected from five secondary schools in the South-West Region of Nigeria. Tina and Adewale (2015) noted that group learning strategy is a successful instructional strategy for teaching group dynamic concepts based upon the nature of interaction among the students in the learning situation. It was observed that students became active participants in the learning process rather than simply passive observers. Tina and Adewale (2015) noted that in the light of these findings, group work and Social Studies as a subject could help promote moral values and national unity in Nigeria and beyond. Although the study is closer to this current study as they both focus on group work and Social Studies, the participants are different. The study's participants were students and the study did not focus on teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES as a catalyst to the promotion of the moral values and national unity.

Similarly, in a study by Matebele (2005) on the role of teaching and learning Social studies in cultivating democratic principles among Junior secondary school students in Botswana, it was found that there is a relationship between learning and student participation in activities. This means that learning in the real sense takes place where there is learner involvement through problem solving strategies such as group work. Schools are expected to reflect democratic teaching and learning by using methods which promote students' active participation in classrooms such as group work. However, this current study is carried out in primary schools in Malawi to see if teachers' practices of the use of group work method affect learners' participation in activities. Likewise, in a study in Primary schools in Malawi by Chancellor College's CERT (2015), it was observed that working in groups allow learners to participate more unlike in a whole class situation. The study focused much on learner-centred methods in general and not on teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES which is the centre of the current study.

Fourthly, group work provides an opportunity for fast learners to scaffold the slow learners. This gives room for the teacher to spend more time on those pupils who need special help and attention (Mtunda & Safuli, 1986). In a study to explore the case of Malawi in its efforts to shift to an active-learning approach as one initiative toward education reform by Mizrachi et al. (2010), teachers reported that in the context of group work emphasized in their lessons they have observed active participation taking place as evidenced by high-achieving students more often helping low-achieving students. Likewise, Chulu and Chiziwa (2010) conducted a mid-term review (MTR) of Primary

Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) in Malawi whose findings indicate that teachers are using learner centred approaches such as group work when facilitating learning in classrooms (Chulu & Chiziwa, 2010). The general view of teachers was that new teaching methodologies, such as group work, were proving to be useful in promoting the active learning process in the classroom. It was felt that group work facilitated the sharing of ideas among learners and that slow learners had an opportunity to learn from fast learners (Chulu & Chiziwa, 2010). However, the studies by CERT (2015), Mizrachi et al. (2010), and Chulu and Chiziwa (2010) above were general and covered all subjects and primary classes while this current study is focused on teachers' practices on the use of group work method in standard eight Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum.

Furthermore, use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences leads to the development of essential skills. Artzt (1990) claims that group work has been credited with the promotion of critical thinking, higher-level thinking and improved problem solving abilities of students. For instance, Mintah (2014) in an action research about using group work method in a business studies class which he conducted in Ghana found that when group work method is effectively used offers students the chance to practise what they are taught in class; develop the creative skills in them; reinforces students' understanding; lessens the teacher's work load; inculcates in students social skill like self-confidence, self-expression, leadership skills, tolerance, which are essential for individual development and nation building. However, the study was conducted in business studies, but this current one is conducted in Social and Environmental Sciences. Similarly, Oyibe (2014) in a study where he investigated students' preference of

instructional methods used in teaching and learning of Social studies in secondary schools in Abakaliki metropolis of Ebonyi State, Nigeria, found that cooperative methods such as group work method enhanced the development of critical thinking and good social interaction skills. However, the study focused on Social Studies students but this current study's focus is on Social and Environmental Sciences teachers' practices of the use of group work method.

Comparably, Zeki and Güneyli (2014) conducted a study titled 'student teachers' perceptions about their experiences in a student centered course' whose participants were thirty seven third year students in North Cyprus. The findings of the study revealed that the student centred course focusing on group work approach had a positive impact on the development of cognitive skills such as reflective, critical and creative thinking; problem solving; and questioning skills. Zeki and Güneyli (2014) further state that this was so because it was students doing all the thinking through analyzing and synthesising the knowledge rather than receiving it directly from the teacher. However, the study was carried across different subjects and this study is conducted in Social and Environmental Sciences. In addition, the study was carried out on mature learners at a college level while the current study is on young learners, hence the need to find if the opportunities of group work can be the same.

Lastly, group work is also an authentic form of assessment in terms of a student's later employability, as working in groups is an essential part of an individual's career, and recruiters often ask students about their experience of working in group settings (Bourner

& Bournier, 2001; Davies, 2009; Learning and Information Services, 2014; Maguire & Edmondson, 2001). Watkins (2012) states that employers need good team workers and better social skills, which are better established through group work method in schools. A survey of employers in Wales found that team and group working skills were ranked fourth in importance after communication, understanding customer needs and the ability to learn (Cardiff University, 2001).

2.4 Challenges in the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences

Although group work offers a number of opportunities, there are some challenges that are encountered when using it.

2.4.1 Failure to use group work method effectively

Research carried out in seven member countries of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) have indicated that although participatory methods like group work are advocated in education circles, classroom teaching and learning activities are teacher driven and dominated by the chalk-and- talk (teacher centred) styles of teaching because teachers are not properly trained on the use of these methods (Harber, 1997). Similarly, in a study by Metto & Makewa, (2014) concerning learner centred teaching and learning which includes group work in Primary schools in Kenya, it was revealed that despite the benefits of student centered teaching, many teachers in Kenya continue to use teacher-centered teaching approaches because teachers have not been trained and have never had personal experience on how to use these methods. Hence, there is need to find if teachers

in Malawi have received adequate training to support their practices on the use of group work method in SES.

By contrast, research findings in Turkey revealed that introduction of participatory methods such as group work method at a moderate adaptive pace while taking on board teacher development has led to a great use of the approaches (Mohammad & Harlech-Jones, 2009). However, Turkey is more developed than Malawi hence the need to find out if the introduction of participatory methods at moderate pace can improve teachers' practices on the use of group work method.

In addition, lack of training makes teachers to use irrelevant group tasks. Some tasks that teachers use are not challenging enough for the development of skills in learners. A study carried out in Malawi showed that teachers lacked the pedagogic knowledge to use participatory approaches like group work effectively (Chiphiko & Shawa, 2014). The data from observations also showed that teachers failed to advance group tasks and activities that are challenging to foster critical thinking and problem solving skills in learners during classroom instruction. The tasks that were given in groups were not as complex as those that learners would likely meet in their real lives which is indicative of lack of proper training on the part of teachers (Chiphiko & Shawa, 2014). This study was generally done across all subjects and in various grade levels. Results were not disaggregated by subject. The current study explores teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES only and standard eight in particular.

In a study by Lewin and Stuart (2003) to explore different aspects of initial teacher education in five countries-Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago, it was found that although new pedagogic approaches such as group work were often advocated for, there was little evidence of their application to the training process itself. The format of teaching, and the presentation of text materials often seem to be chalk and talk (Lewin & Stuart, 2003). Lewin and Stuart (2003) lament that this does not model effectively many of the novel pedagogic practices advocated for primary school teaching. However, the study was conducted in Teacher Training Colleges while this study would like to find out how such a kind of teacher education affects teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES in primary schools.

Furthermore, teachers lack proper practices when organising group work. Some teachers are willing to use group work method but their practices are a deviation from the norm of using the method. In a study conducted by Mhlauli (2010) titled 'Social studies teachers' perceptions and practices of educating citizens in a democracy in upper classes in primary schools in Botswana', it was found that teachers' pedagogical practices tended to be in conflict with their views as they believed that they developed democratic participatory skills through the use of group work while in fact what they termed group work was only a seating arrangement. It was found that students were not given the opportunity to be involved in decision making or participating in traditional group activities (Mhlauli, 2010). The development of skills should always be accompanied by practice which was not the case in these classrooms as students were not engaged in any meaningful activities geared towards developing a repertoire of skills (Mhlauli, 2010).

Mhlauli (2010) further observed that teachers believed that they were giving their students group work while they were only asking them to memorise and regurgitate the facts in their textbooks, which is indicative of lack of knowledge and training. The study by Mhlauli (2010) is closer to the current study because it focused on Social Studies and the only difference is that it was on the teachers' perceptions and practices of educating citizens in a democracy while the current one is purely on teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES.

In a related study, Kagoda (2009) explored ways that can be used to enhance the teaching and learning of Geography through small group discussions, and revealed that group discussion as a method of teaching was not used by teachers in secondary schools of Uganda. Kagoda (2009) further noted that teachers need to be sensitized and guided as to how to use small group discussions for effective teaching especially in practical lessons of map reading, drawing graphs, and fieldwork. Teachers should practise using small group discussions in their Geography classes for effective teaching and learning. Kagoda (2009) recommended for the organisation of more refresher courses by the Ministry of Education and Sports to enable teachers share their classroom experiences with other teachers from other parts of Uganda. The study was based on the secondary school sector and in Geography and hence the need for this study which focuses on teachers' practices on the use of group work method specifically on primary school sector and Social and Environmental Sciences. Based on the above findings that teacher capacity building is a concern, it can be argued that the training of Social and Environmental Sciences teachers for the effective use group work method is not taken serious.

2.4.2 Assessment through group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences

Some studies have shown that teachers find it challenging to take on board group work method because national examinations are based on behaviourist assumptions about knowledge other than constructivism (Vavrus, Thomas, & Bartlett, 2011). In a study using mixed method design and a sample of one hundred and fifty final year teacher-trainees conducted in Ghana about ‘sense of efficacy in implementing the basic school Social studies curriculum’, it was perceived that teachers of Social studies use lecturing method most of the time because examinations demand rote memorization of information learned (Bekoe, Quashigah, Kankam, Eshun, & Bordoh, 2014).

In line with this, Tabulawa (2009) observes that teacher educators in Botswana struggle with the learner centred approach like group work because it is not in line with the context as the behaviourist objectives in the curricula and national examinations are not in line with such approaches. Teachers do not know whether to teach pre-packaged chunks of knowledge as found in the curricula and national examinations or to encourage students to think critically about the authoritative knowledge in the text books. These observations by Tabulawa (2009) were made on teachers of all subjects and this current study focuses on teachers’ practices on the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. Even in Malawi, it is a challenge to use group work method because standard eight examinations emphasize the knowledge domain at the expense of the skills and attitudes domains (Mhango, 2008).

In addition, high stakes testing influence teachers to handle their lessons using teacher centred methods other than participatory approaches such as group work method. The teachers' focus is to make learners pass examinations (Mhango, 2008). In a study which explored the case of Malawi in its efforts to shift to an active-learning approach as one initiative toward education reform, Mizrachi et al. (2010) observed that the nature of the examination system in Malawi is an obstacle to the effective use of active-learning methods, group work inclusive (Mizrachi et al., 2010). A high-stakes system in which a pupil's future is determined by their examination performance at the end of Standard 8 creates a system that promotes the use of teacher centered pedagogies. However, in order for active-learning to take root really, the government should reform its promotion policies to incorporate both final examinations and continuous assessment (Mizrachi et al., 2010).

The teachers' focus is on making learners pass standard eight final examinations so that they should be able to secure form one places which are not enough for all the learners. Chakwera, Khembo, and Sireci (2004) contend that Malawians' interest for secondary school education has increased over the years because the grade eight certificate is no longer useful for the job market. Standard eight written examinations are the only gate-keeping tool for entrance into secondary school education in Malawi (Chakwera et al., 2004). The studies were done across all subjects and focusing on all active learning pedagogies. However, what is missing in the body of literature is an answer to the question: what are primary school teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES as a reaction to high stakes testing.

2.4.3 Time use in group work method

The other challenge of group work method is that it is time consuming. In various studies that have been conducted elsewhere, it is noted that group work method is time consuming. A lot of time is spent in the group discussions, monitoring, reporting, evaluation and consolidation of the group tasks. Farris (1997) argues that participatory approaches, group work inclusive are time consuming because the learner become so involved in each and every activity in the lesson. In an action research conducted in Ghana using mixed methods design, Mintah (2014) noted that the use of group work method in a business studies class was found to be time consuming. The group work method was found to be time consuming in terms of planning, supervision and controlling of all activities.

On the contrary, group work is deemed as time consuming because of wide syllabus. Teachers struggle to make sure that they manage to cover the whole syllabus. In the end the teachers tend to shun participatory approaches such as group work and opt for chalk and talk styles of teaching and learning so that the syllabus is covered in time. Sikoyo (2010) reports on a study conducted in Uganda that time constraint continue to impinge on the use of participatory approaches as teachers are compelled to complete the curriculum for students to pass examinations. The studies discussed above were general and covered different subjects. This study is imperative as it finds out how teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES are affected by the issue of time consuming.

2.4.4 Large classes and limited availability of resources

It is challenging to use group work method in classrooms with a large number of students, poor facilities and limited instructional resources. Large number of learners make resources not to be adequate. Limited economic power limits many governments to provide resources in schools such as flip charts, petal markers and text books which are central to the effective use of active learning pedagogies like group work method (Ginsburg, 2006). This problem is so rife in Sub Saharan Africa where most classes are overcrowded and have short supply of teaching, learning and assessment resources (Vavrus et al., 2011). For instance, learner centred approaches were sporadically implemented in Uganda due to the inadequacy of the furnishing and equipment in the class rooms (Ginsburg, 2006). Similarly, Kishindo, Mwale, Ndalama, and Susuwele (2005) state that most classes in Malawi are overcrowded, and teaching and learning materials are in short supply, making it difficult or nearly impossible for learners to get hands-on experience.

Therefore, large classes and shortage of resources reduce learners' participation during group work activities. For instance, in a study sought to uncover the factors that have hindered the use of learner-centered methods including group work in Kenya public primary schools, Metto and Makewa (2014) noted that large classes hinder effective use of learner-centered teaching because this stifle learners' discussions with other students. It was further noted that the physical arrangement e.g. circular arrangement to facilitate discussions may not be possible in a crowded classroom. This large classroom phenomena was found to be exacerbated by scarcity of resources in Public Primary

schools in Kenya as a result of mismanagement, corruption and failures in monitoring, maintenance and equipping schools (Metto & Makewa, 2014). Similarly, in a study by the University of Malawi's CERT (2015) about monitoring primary school teachers in the implementation of learner centred education in Malawi, it was noted that some groups were too large for learners to participate and work together effectively. CERT (2015) also observed that some groups had more than 15 learners per group and that the grouping was simply to share the few learners' books that were available for the class. Similarly, Chipshiko and Shawa (2014) conducted a study titled 'implementing learner-centred approaches to instruction in primary schools in Malawi' and the results uncovered that overcrowded classrooms made it difficult for teachers to come up with good seating arrangement and as a result interaction among learners, which could have taken place in collaborative and cooperative activities like in group work failed to take place (Chipshiko & Shawa, 2014).

In addition, overcrowded classrooms made teachers fail to carry out meaningful group work activities. Teachers do not manage to go through all the steps of organizing group work. For instance, based on a fieldwork study in selected schools in Kampala by Altinyelken (2010), it was observed that the majority of classrooms had students who were seated in large groups ranging from 6 to 30, making it impossible to carry out meaningful group work activities. Again the resources to be used during group work were limited. (Altinyelken, 2010).

Similarly, Chulu and Chiziwa (2010) in a study titled mid-term review (MTR) of Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) in Malawi, most teachers reported that they fail to conclude most group activities because of large class sizes. It was observed that the high pupil teacher ratio which is characteristic of most of the schools in Malawi was not properly modelled into the PCAR implementation plan (Chulu & Chiziwa, 2010). For instance, the pupil teacher ratio for the infant classes averaged 1:98, whereas that for the Junior classes was 1:80 instead of 1:60 which impacted negatively on the delivery of PCAR learner centred methodologies such as group work (Chulu & Chiziwa, 2010). The studies discussed above were general while this current study focuses on how teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences are affected by shortage of resources.

2.4.5 The impact of sociocultural context on teachers' use of group work method

Some teachers are struggling to adopt participatory approaches such as group work method because of their socio cultural background where elders are supposed to be in control and children to be obedient and not question those who are in authority (Schweisfurth, 2011). For instance, Bowering, Leggett, Harvey, and Hui (2007) reports that teachers in China are reluctant to use group work method because both the traditions and current practice of Chinese education are in conflict with this method. As a result, group work is not used frequently because teachers, as knowledge holders and transmitters, are regarded as the center of the classroom. Bowering et al. (2007) state further that teachers are expected to be the classroom authority in knowledge and

morality, as a result of which students largely depend on teachers for the source of learning material and the correct way of interpreting the material. The study was carried in an Asian socio cultural context while this current study explores how socio cultural context in Malawi affect teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Tabulawa (1998) on teachers' practices in Senior secondary schools in Botswana, it was found that students resisted the use of child centered methods such as group work and discussions and preferred teacher-centered methods because of their sociocultural background. In another study in Botswana, it was also found that teachers are grappling to embrace participatory approaches such as group work method because the sociocultural contexts there are not based on egalitarian or constructivism principles (Tabulawa, 2009).

Similarly, studies in Kenya concerning learner centred teaching in primary schools concurs with the findings in Botswana that the teacher should be the bearer and sharer of knowledge while displaying power and prestige to learners (Metto & Makewa, 2014). Likewise, Kasanda (2005) reports that it is a greater challenge for teachers in Namibia where the cultural tradition is so strong for them to admit ignorance of certain information accessed and constructed by learners. All this means that group work method should incorporate certain socio cultural elements of the area for it to be wholly taken on board by both teachers and learners. It is surprising that child centered methods advocated by the Social studies curriculum do not include any pedagogies that are based

on the students' culture and ways of knowing, that is to say, indigenous forms of knowing such as riddles, proverbs and storytelling (Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006).

2.4.6 The impact of language of instruction on teachers' use of group work method

Many countries have adopted the languages of their colonial master as language of instruction in schools. Vernacular languages are mostly used in the lower grades of the primary school sector. In the upper primary school level, the language of instruction is mostly the foreign one. The use of a language which learners are not familiar with reduces learners' participation during group work. For example, in a fieldwork study in selected schools in Kampala by Altinyelken (2010), teachers observed that learners were much quieter in the classroom and had learning difficulties when English, the language of the colonial master was used as a medium of instruction. Most teachers were of the view that the use of second language as a medium of instruction hinders the use of participatory approaches in the classroom. The ability of learners to reason and participate in group discussions was found to be directly related to their mastery of English (Altinyelken, 2010).

Participatory approaches demands for higher learner participation, increased interactions between learners and teachers, and among learners through group work and discussions (Altinyelken, 2010). Language directly relates to student participation in the classroom in the sense that when learners are not fluent in the language they cannot freely talk or interact with their teachers and fellow learners. It was further found that teachers often

used the local language, Luganda, when they needed to explain something in detail, or to give directions to learners. Foreign languages stifle learners' participation and contributions to given tasks when participatory approaches such as group work method are taken on board. However, the study was done across all subjects and this current study is specifically on Social and Environmental Sciences.

Similarly, Mhango (2008) observed that state policies that support the use of English as a medium of instruction curtails students' active participation in lesson activities. Mhango (2008) reports that the reduction of students' participation due to the use of English as medium of instruction was somehow comprehensible, however, the magnitude of curtailment of students from class participation, even at grade eight level, was one of the surprises of his enquiry. Mhango (2008) further discovered that when the teachers switched to vernacular, students' participation increased. The study by Mhango (2008) is a bit closer to this current study because it focused on Social Studies. However, the study had nothing to do with teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method. In addition, the participants of this current study are standard eight teachers only whereas Mhango (2008) used participants across different grade levels.

Surprisingly, teachers also face fluency challenges as regards to the use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction. The MUSTER study reported by Vavrus, Thomas, and Bartlett (2011) found that student teachers' academic English, the medium of instruction was poor. This is a critical problem given that learner-centered teaching requires the use of clear and understandable language in giving directions, guiding and

asking relevant questions that enable learners to effectively and gainfully engage in the learning process (Vavrus et al., 2011). However, this study was carried on student teachers while this current study is focusing on qualified teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This study is based on Pierre Bourdieu's social field theory (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu's social field theory highlights a network of relations and discursive practices that influence teacher practices. Bourdieu's social field theory confirm the complexities of teacher development and teacher change by focusing on the dynamic relationships between structure and agency within a social practice, pointing to the promise and possibility of social change through critical reflexivity (Nolan, 2012). Bourdieu posits a situated critical reflexivity, that is, "a reflexivity which is not separated from the everyday but is intrinsically linked to the (unconscious) categories of habit which shape action" (Adkins, 2004, p. 195). Widin, Yasukawa, and Chodkiewicz (2012) posit that Bourdieu's work is of particular value in examining experiences of a teaching context and practice. Bourdieu's social field theory offers a number of key concepts namely field, habitus, capital, misrecognition and symbolic violence. The study specifically leans on Bourdieu's three thinking tools of habitus, field and capital as lens to explore teachers' practices and experiences of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. Bourdieu's tools of habitus, capital and field allow real insight into the lived experiences of teachers on the use of group work method (Supple & Agbenyega, 2015). The conceptual tools of habitus, field and capital are not stand-alone concepts (Swartz, 2008).

Bourdieu sees practice e.g. teaching to be a result of the interplay of these three concepts namely field, capital and habitus.

Firstly, habitus is defined as attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and practices formed through the embodiment of one's life story (Nolan, 2012). Habitus can express the 'meaning of things' through providing an explanation of the phenomena that exist in the social structure because of one's direct involvement in it (DiGiorgio, 2010). Reay (2004) describes habitus as internalised master dispositions which lead to individual perceptions and actions that are long-lasting in character. For example, before pre-service teachers enter college to train as teachers they come with already constructed habitus (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2012). These developed or developing dispositions, values, beliefs and attitudes, which are deeply-rooted within them, influence the ways they interpret and make sense of their social world and of other people (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2012). Thus, Bourdieu (1990) contends that habitus potentially generates a wide repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to either be transformative or retain the same constraining courses of action.

For instance, habitus includes scope for change and improvisation, and this is seen through individuals' responses to a lack of fit between habitus and field (Bourdieu, 2004). Entry to a new field can be seen as providing the opportunity for habitus to change as individuals are confronted by the unfamiliar situation such as the use of group work method as opposed to teacher centred methods. That is not to say that habitus will necessarily change in response to the demand of the field. However, where habitus and

field create an almost seamless fit, the possibilities and potentials for change are unlikely (Davey, 2009). Practices and actions are the manifestations of the habitus and can be reconstructed to fit a new social context (Clark, Zukas, & Lent, 2011). Everyday decisions made in a school shape, and are shaped by one's habitus (Bourdieu, 1990).

The way teachers handle their lessons is a reflection of their habitus. Habitus is the pattern of behaviour of individuals and are predictable (DiGiorgio, 2009), and in this study it would mean the behavior and action displayed by teachers when teaching using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. Teachers' day-to-day direct involvement in the school, while being engaged in the education system, would recount their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). In this study, habitus can be the teachers' practices, actions, beliefs, attitude and experiences they display when implementing group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. This would mean interpreting the habitus of teachers' practices on the use of group work method.

Secondly, field refers to social and institutional settings (Reay, 2004). Field is characterised with things such as schools, institutions, manifestos and political declarations (Bourdieu, 1985). In a field, occupants produce practices and compete with one another to develop capacities (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008) and this study, practice may mean group work. Hutchings and Huber (2008) contend that teachers must acquire the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge to work properly in the field of education. In this study, field can refer to the curriculum, the classroom, the whole school and all stake holders like Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) and how they affect

teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES. Bourdieu (1990) posits that fields are historically constituted areas of activity with their specific institutions and their own laws of functioning. This entails that every field has rules and norms, which determine the nature of interactions of the agents (teachers). In this study, one of the norms and rules of the field include language policy of using English as a medium of instruction in schools.

The last concept of Bourdieu is capital. Capital plays an important role in the relationship between field and habitus. Bourdieu (1985) contends that there are four types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital, as well as symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to wealth defined in monetary terms; cultural capital involves a person's or institution's possession of recognised knowledge; social capital is constituted by social ties; and symbolic capital refers to one's status, or prestige (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For example, economic capital can determine the type of teaching resources and facilities available in primary schools to support the use of group work method. DiGiorgio (2009) asserts that economic capital is important at the school level as public schools are required to provide services for students. Examples of cultural capital include: educational qualification, knowledge, skills and authority (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002) and in this study it refers to the knowledge and skills of using group work method when teaching Social and Environmental Sciences. Cultural capital acts as a mechanism to confer power to individuals who inhabit a field (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990).

In this study, economic capital entails the kind of teaching and learning resources, and facilities available at a school to facilitate teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES. Cultural capital entails teachers' knowledge and skills that facilitate the use of group work method in SES. The extent to which participants are able to make an effective use of the resources, knowledge and skills they are endowed with is a function of the adaptation of their habitus in the field (Bourdieu, 2004). In this study, teachers' practices on the use of group work method would be effective if they are adaptive to the paradigm shift to participatory teaching from teacher centred teaching.

The thinking tools work together to produce practice as in the following illustration:

‘(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice (use of group work in SES)

In this study, the use of group work method in SES is a function of teachers' habitus (attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, practices and experiences), capital (knowledge, skills, resources and facilities) and field (the classroom, school and entire education system). This framework was used to inform the methodology and interpret the research findings.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the literature that relates to the themes of this study. The first part has looked at the development of Social and Environmental Sciences. It has also unpacked the relationship of Social and Environmental Sciences with group work method, which is both entities play a complementary role to the development of good citizenship. The other part is concerned with the way group work is conducted and this focused at group composition, group tasks and organization of group work in the

classroom. In addition, opportunities of using group work were discussed such as improving learners' performance, participation and development of essential skills. Furthermore, challenges affecting the use of group work were discussed such as lack of training of teachers, shortage of resources, large classes, time consuming, language barrier and sociocultural context. The gaps identified were that some of the studies were carried in developed countries and different socio cultural contexts. Some of the studies focused on participatory methods in general and not purely on teachers practices regarding the use of group work method. Most of the studies were not disaggregated by subject. The last sub-section discussed Bourdieu's thinking tools as the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The next chapter looks at the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the methodology and design used in this study. It presents the research design, sampling, methods for generating data and data analysis. Details on how issues of credibility and trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations and limitations of the study were addressed are presented.

3.1 Research methodology

All research methodology rests upon a bedrock axiom: the nature of the data and the problem for research dictate the research methodology (Leedy, 1993). This study sought to understand qualitative practices of teachers when teaching Social and Environmental Sciences using group work method. The study therefore used a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative study dwells on descriptions of phenomena (May, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Punch (1998) contends that qualitative research remains the single most crucial way to get records and meaning that people attach to activities that they do in a given context. This approach was thus found appropriate for this study because it allowed the generation of rich descriptions of the practices that teachers attach to the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

This qualitative study is based on the school of thought known as post positivism which believes that social reality is constructed differently by different individuals (Wisker, 2008). Post positivist researchers generate primarily verbal data and then subject it to analytical induction (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). This view of social reality posits that individuals gradually build their own understanding of the world through experience. This study used a post-positivist paradigm of interpretivism. Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual's perspective (Creswell, 2009). Interpretivism assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation, hence there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking and reasoning by humans. It is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. Grix (2004) contends that the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it. It attempts to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. This meant that teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES were subjected to interpretation in order to understand the phenomena much better.

Teachers' practices of the use of group work in SES were not reduced to simplistic interpretations but new layers of understanding were uncovered as phenomena were thickly described (Scotland, 2012). Interpretive perspective is usually inductive, being generated from the data, not preceding it (Cohen et al., 2007). This meant that teachers' practices of the use of group work method were inductively interpreted from the data generated. Interpretive methods yield insight and understandings of behavior, explain actions from the participant's perspective, and do not dominate the participants (Scotland, 2012).

3.2.1 Research design

This study followed a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is one of the variants of qualitative, and naturalistic approaches (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) to research. Cresswell (2009) states that a phenomenological study looks at lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon. Phenomenology helps to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). When using phenomenological methodology, researchers should not assume they know what things mean to people they are studying. Cresswell (2009) states that, the researcher brackets or sets aside his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. In this study when generating teachers' practices of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences, the researcher bracketed his experiences in order to understand those of the teachers.

3.2.2 Sample and Sampling method

Sampling is an important and integral element in any research study (Ary, Jacob, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). This study used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects "information-rich" participants for in-depth study (Cohen et al., 2007; Cresswell, 2009; Mack, woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005; Patton, 1990). Ball (1990) posits that purposive sampling is used in order to access 'knowledgeable people' i.e. those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, may be by virtue of their professional role, expertise or experience.

In this study, as a naturalist researcher “information rich” schools and teachers on the basis of their relevance to my research questions; were purposively sampled. The schools were purposively sampled with the guidance of the Primary Education Advisor with the aid of performance records of all schools in the selected zone. This meant that information-rich primary school teachers i.e. those from whom the researcher learned experiences of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences were sampled. The participants of this study comprised eight standard eight primary school teachers who teach Social and Environmental Sciences. The teachers were purposively sampled with the guidance of the Primary Education Advisors and Head teachers who had the performance records of the teachers. Standard eight was purposely sampled bearing in mind the following factors: firstly, is the terminal point of primary school in Malawi, hence learners were expected to be experienced with the use of group work method during learning. Secondly, standard 8 only lasts two terms instead of the three terms as ‘Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations’ (PSLCE) are written in the first weeks of third term (Mizrachi et al., 2010). Thus it was important to understand how teachers handle the use of group work in such a tight time frame. So there was need to find out teachers’ experiences of how these factors affect the use of group work method in teaching and learning of Primary Social and Environmental Sciences.

In addition, five schools were purposively sampled in Machinga district in one zone with the hope that they would have unique and interesting experiences of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. The five schools that were purposively sampled, three were from a rural area and two were from an urban area. This

helped to bring a comparison in experiences between rural and urban schools. This was so because in urban centres there were more teachers than rural areas which helped to find out how these two scenarios affect the use of group work method. In addition, primary schools in urban centres have a large population of learners than rural areas. Thus, the need to compare how use of group work method are affected by these factors. The zone was selected using convenience sampling for proximity reasons because it is closer to the researcher's residential site. This provided ease of access for the researcher. Furthermore, studying one's backyard provides easy access to information at minimal cost (Cresswell, 1998) .

3.2.3 Methods of generating data

The methods for generating data that were used in this study are semi structured interviews, lesson observation, and document analysis. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were employed in this study. An interview can be described in terms of individuals directing their attention towards each other with the purpose of opening up the possibility of gaining an insight into the experiences and knowledge of the other (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Schostak, 2006). Seidman (1998) remarks that interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. This is in line with the demands of this study which looked at teachers' experiences of the use of group work in Social and Environmental Sciences. Cresswell (2003) defines semi-structured interviews as a method where the researcher conducts face to face conversation with participants. Semi-structured interviews helped to give a chance to the researcher to probe with additional questions where the explanation is not clear

(Mukherji & Albon, 2010; Seidman, 1998). The semi-structured interviews helped to note gestures and facial expressions to add influence to data generated (Opdenakker, 2006).

The semi-structured interviews were administered twice. The first semi-structured interview was done in order to get rapport and familiarity (mostly acting as a harbinger to the second interview). The other semi-structured interviews were done after lesson observation to reflect what was happening in the lessons. In addition, the other semi-structured interviews were conducted to fill gaps and confirm member checking.

Following the tenets of Bourdieu's thinking tools, teachers were interviewed to provide an in-depth understanding of factors that affected the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences through their experiences as frontline implementers. The participants were interviewed on the cultural capital (knowledge, skills and ability) of conducting group work method. They were also interviewed on how the field (the school environment, education system, and stakeholders like MANEB) and economic capital (availability of instructional resources) affect teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES. The participants were asked if they could grant the permission to record them. The recorder was used to supplement what pencil and paper omitted. The participants were informed that the recordings would be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. All but two participants accepted to be recorded. All the semi-structured interviews were conducted in 'Chichewa' although the teachers' responses were a mixture of Chichewa and English. The use of Chichewa assisted the participants to be free to air

out all their experiences. An interview guide (see appendix F) was used to generate data from teachers as it provided chance for clarification, and probing of responses (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006).

In addition, lesson observation was conducted as it allowed for detailed observation of unusual aspects (Cresswell, 2009). The most distinctive feature of lesson observation was that it offered the researcher the opportunity to gather ‘live’ data from naturally occurring social situations (Cohen et al., 2007). Lesson observation is prime because what people do may differ from what they say (Cohen et al., 2007; Mack et al., 2005; Robson, 2002), and in this case some teachers reported experiences of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences different from what was actually happening on the ground. Lesson observation also assisted the researcher to record non-verbal behavior in natural settings (Bailey, 1994). Three lesson observations were conducted on each teacher in order to fill gaps and confirm member checking. The aim was to experience teachers’ teaching Social and Environmental Sciences using group work method from their natural settings.

By employing tenets of Bourdieu’ thinking tools, the researcher observed teachers’ habitus (practices, actions, beliefs, attitude and experiences) displayed when using group work method in SES. The researcher also observed how teachers’ cultural capital (skills and knowledge) and economic capital (instructional resources) affect teachers’ practices on the use of group work method in SES. The researcher also observed how the field (the school and classroom environment) affect teachers’ practices on the use of group work

method in SES. Through informed consent, the supervision of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences was made possible. Three classroom observations were conducted with each of the eight teachers. During lesson observation, mostly the researcher sat at the back to avoid distracting the class. Paper and pencil were used to write the observations. This was supplemented by an audio- recorder. An observation check list (see appendix G and H) was used to observe lessons (Mack et al., 2005).

Another method of data generation was document analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). Document analysis is a non-interactive strategy for obtaining qualitative data with little or no reciprocity between the researcher and the participants (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006). These are documents that the teacher prepares for teaching. The documents that were analysed were schemes and records of work and lesson plans. The way group work method was conducted in Social and Environmental Sciences was cross-checked in the documents. A scheme of work is an interpretation of the syllabus indicating the amount of ground the teacher is likely to cover during a term (Mtunda & Safuli, 1986). A lesson plan is an outline of important ideas such as content, methods and activities a teacher intends to cover in the process of teaching and learning (Mtunda & Safuli, 1986).

By employing Bourdieu's thinking tools, the researcher checked the lesson plan and schemes of work to see how teachers' cultural capital (knowledge and skills) were taken on board when conducting group work in Social and Environmental Sciences. The researcher also checked the kind of economic capital (instructional resources) that were used to support teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES. The analysis

also examined teachers' habitus whether there was alignment or deviation of their schemes and records of work and lesson plans from the suggestions in the teacher's guide as a curriculum document. Document analysis check list (see appendix I) derived from research questions and theoretical frame work was used to generate data.

Prior to data generation, a pilot study was conducted. This study was conducted at a primary school other than the sampled schools. The main aim for the pilot study was to test the instruments of their clarity and relevance. Cohen et al. (2007) contend that a pilot study enables a researcher to make necessary amendments to the observation system, or procedure. It also enabled the researcher to rehearse the process of generating data so that where necessary amendments could be done. The teachers were first interviewed and then their documents i.e. lesson plan and scheme of work were scrutinized to generate data. Lesson observation was conducted on the second day. A recorder was used during semi- structured interviews and lesson observation. The pilot study assisted the researcher to realise the need to probe for more responses during semi- structured interviews. It also assisted the researcher to refine the instruments here and there.

3.2.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is a method of categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising data to attain answers to a specific research question (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2011). Data were analysed qualitatively as the purpose of the study was to understand and gain insight of teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method in SES (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Due to the bulkiness of the data in a phenomenological

qualitative study, analysis and interpretation of the data was an on-going process starting immediately the data generation process commenced. This is in line with what Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 50) assert that the researcher should “cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data”.

The analysis of the data for this study, took on board thematic analysis which involved developing of codes, categories, themes or issues with reference to the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007). Codes are words or phrases that give clear intended meaning from data. The codes are then put into categories. Themes are major lessons that are implied through connecting threads and patterns of various categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Seidman, 2006). “Issues” refer to individual-based concerns or actual words spoken by individuals (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003).

In this study the following step-by-step thematic data analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed: The first step involved organising the data from semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and document analysis into data files to make it easy to gather categories and themes. The lesson observation and semi-structured interview notes were beefed up with the recordings to ensure that they were comprehensive. The data from semi-structured interviews, and lesson observation were transcribed verbatim into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis. This was done immediately after the lesson observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted to avoid forgetting some details.

The second step was to familiarise oneself with the data. This involved reading the notes from the data files repeatedly in order to identify words, phrases, issues, ideas and patterns that came out frequently to be organised into categories or codes. The data that was transcribed was read and reread in order to be familiar with it. Braun and Clarke (2006) contends that it is vital that a researcher should immerse oneself in the data to the extent that one is familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Reading repeatedly each data file also assisted the researcher to bracket personal preconceptions.

The third step was generating of codes. The codes identified a feature of the data that appeared to be interesting (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding refers to the process of organising the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Cresswell, 2009). The words, phrase, issues and ideas relevant to answer the research questions were organized into categories or codes. Different colours were used to identify the patterns and categories.

The next step was searching for the themes. This involved sorting the different codes into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was used to generate potential themes for analysis (Cresswell, 2009). After coding was done the different categories and patterns were collapsed under one main over-arching theme. This stage allowed the generation of candidate themes, and sub-themes, and all extracts of data that have been coded.

Then a review of the themes followed. This involved the refinement of the original themes. At this stage some themes that did not have enough data to support them were discarded, while others were collapsed into each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This helped to bring a fairly good idea of what the different themes were, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data.

The other step was defining and naming the themes. The themes were defined and further refined. Braun and Clarke (2006) contends that ‘define and refine’ meant identifying the essence of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures.

The final step was interpretation of the data: This involved making an interpretation or meaning of the data (Cresswell, 2009). This was done through the lens of Bourdieu’s thinking tools as well as what literature says in relation to the findings of this study.

3.2.5 Data management

Storage and retrieval of data is the heart of data management in that without clear working scheme, data can be miscoded, mislabeled and misled (Punch, 1994). In this study, data from semi-structured interviews, lesson observation and document analysis were transcribed, typed and saved in a computer, flash disks, and e mail. A hard copy was also produced and kept safely in a locked drawer.

3.2.6 Credibility and trustworthiness of the study

The word ‘trustworthiness’ entails the rigour that produces the relevance of research (Krefting, 1991). Firstly, triangulation was used. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sites, sources of data and methods of data generation in studying the same topic in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2002). Findings are more trustworthy when they can be confirmed from several independent sources, methods and researchers. Triangulation, in this study, was achieved by using different data generating methods i.e. semi structured interviews, lesson observation and document analysis (Cohen et al., 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Thereafter, the data generated from different methods were compared.

In addition, there was independent audit during the process of generating and analysing data (Cohen et al., 2007). The researcher ensured that acceptable processes of conducting the inquiry are identified and adhered to so that the results are consistent with the data (Cohen et al., 2007).

Lastly, member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determine whether these participants feel that they are accurate (Cresswell, 2009). In the light of this, some themes of the findings were sent to some of the participants to check if they were a reflection of the data they contributed, for example, a clarification on why group work method is not used frequently.

Furthermore, a qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that people who share it would immediately recognize the descriptions (Moen, 2006). In this study, credibility was attained through sufficient engagement with the research participants in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002) for at least two months i.e. the months of January and February, 2016. This helped the researcher to ensure that the data was supported by sufficient evidence, and compared it to quotations from the participants to maintain transferability. Transferability allow for comparison by other researchers (De Vos et al., 2011).

3.3 Ethical considerations

Participants were protected from any possible harm or infringement of their freedom as a result of their participation in the study (Mack et al., 2005; Punch, 1994). Homan (1991) posits that the unethical treatment of participants yields poorer results than respect for them. The following ethical considerations were considered: Firstly, research permission was sought from the District Education Manager for Machinga (see appendix B and C) and Head teachers of the school institutions where data were generated.

Secondly, participants' informed consent was sought for them to take part in the study. Mack et al. (2005) state that informed consent is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate. Informed consent is a process, and it included both informing prospective teachers of what their participation in the research would likely entail and obtained their written or verbal agreement to

participate (Cone & Foster, 2006). The first task in achieving informed consent was to inform the participants about the research in a way they could understand (Mack et al., 2005). The teachers took part in the study on voluntary basis. They were given the freedom to withdraw their participation in the study any time they deem it so. Chilisa and Preece (2005) caution that research should be carried out on human beings provided they have agreed to take part. The participants were told what was expected of a research participant, including the amount of time likely to be required for participation; and the expected risks and benefits, including psychological and social effects (Mack et al., 2005). Permission was also sought from the teachers to take pictures of learners participating in the group activities. The participants were assured that the pictures would not be used for any other purpose besides as illustrations in the write up. Then the participants signed the consent form showing their agreement to participate (see appendix D). However, no teacher declined to participate.

Thirdly, confidentiality and privacy were also maintained (Mack et al., 2005). Confidentiality refers to the researcher not disclosing the identity of the participants or indicating from whom the data were generated (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Participants' anonymity and privacy were done through use of pseudonyms, as well as informed consent (Berg, 1998; Mack et al., 2005). The audio- records had no real names of participants attached. The audios were saved in folders with confidential passwords. The pictures were attached with a pseudonym and not the real names of the participants. Lastly, the participants were also provided with contact information of the researcher

including phone numbers to contact him whenever they wanted any clarification about any aspect of the study (Cresswell, 2009).

3.4 Limitations of the study

The presence of the researcher likely forced the participants to change some of their usual practices which might have some halo effects on the data generated. However, this was taken care of by comparing the data from different sources, that is, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In addition, this problem was also offset by conducting three lesson observation and two semi structured interviews for each participant.

In addition, this research was conducted through the lens of Bourdieu's thinking tools as a theoretical frame work. However, it was possible that if a different theoretical framework was used the research findings might be interpreted differently.

3.5 Chapter summary

This study followed a qualitative research approach in order to investigate teachers' practices when teaching Social and Environmental Sciences using group work method. It followed a phenomenological research design. The participants of this study comprised eight standard eight primary school teachers of Social and Environmental Sciences. Semi structured interviews, classroom observation and document analysis were used to generate data to ensure triangulation of the findings. The analysis of the data used thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) which involved developing codes,

categories and themes. Trustworthiness of the study was maintained through triangulation, member checking and independent audit. Research ethics were maintained through informed consent, confidentiality and privacy. There were some limitations of the study for instance, teachers could change practices during lesson observation thereby creating halo effects. In addition, using a different theoretical frame work might have produced different results. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. The study findings are organised according to the themes that emerged from the data analysis. In each theme, the presentation of the findings appears first, followed by the discussion.

4.1 Characteristics of the participants

There were eight participants who taught Social and Environmental Sciences in standard eight. The participants were identified as Mome, Chingwapi, Phatamphi, Nwikhwondi, Mtubwa, Mtuza, Pwathenrwa and Nathero (pseudonyms). The first three teachers namely Mome, Chingwapi and Phatamphi were teaching in urban schools while the rest were teaching in rural schools. All the participants were qualified teachers. Nathero was a head teacher of a school institution. Chingwapi and Mome were principal primary school teachers and Mtubwa was a senior primary school teacher. The rest of the teachers were at different service levels of the entry grade. The participants had different levels of teaching experience. It was also found that standard eight is taught mostly by male teachers. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	College Trained	Year Graduated	General Teaching Experience (Years)	Experience in teaching SES in Standard 8 (Years)
Nwikhwondi	30	Female	St. Joseph TTC	2005	11	2
Chingwapi	58	Male	Karonga TTC	1986	30	12
Phatamphi	40	Male	Blantyre TTC	2005	11	8
Mtubwa	48	Male	Montfort TTC	2000	16	5
Mtuza	29	Male	Lilongwe TTC	2010	6	2
Pwathenrwa	32	Male	Blantyre TTC	2008	8	3
Nathero	42	Male	Lilongwe TTC	2010	6	2
Mome	56	Male	Lilongwe TTC	1990	26	8

4.2 Primary school teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences

Seven themes emerged through the qualitative analysis of the semi structured interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. The entire data was coded inductively following the patterns which were unfolding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Different colors were used to identify the patterns. Some of the codes generated from the data were: time consuming, mixed gender, single gender group, group size, inadequate resources, teacher shortage, high stakes testing, overcrowded classes, few text books, lack of supervision, lack of in service training, fixed groups, problem with English, lack of preparation, use of Chichewa, group tasks, recall type tests, lack of infrastructure, shortage of space and

mixed ability groups. The activity of data analysis with the guidance of social field theory yielded seven major themes. Some of the themes reflect positive experiences of the teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method in SES while others are negative. The themes that are largely positive were: 'group composition, organization of group work activities', 'categories of group tasks, 'development of democratic and citizenship skills. Those themes that affect teachers' practices negatively were: 'English as a medium of classroom instruction during group work', teaching and learning resources during group work and 'high stakes examination as a limitation of the use of group work method in SES'.

4.3 Group composition

This theme looks at how teachers formed groups. It focuses on the composition of the groups based on four areas namely: size, gender, ability and fixed nature of the groups.

4.3.1 Group size

The results show that some class groups were small and others were very large in size. During semi structured interviews all the teachers said that there should be reasonable number of learners per group. The teachers reported a range of 6-8 as a reasonable group size. For instance, one of the teachers explained as follows:

(Timangowaudza kuti khalani mmagulu a six, six. Timayang'ananso kuti boys and girls are mixed komanso mixing of different ages and abilities to ensure maximum participation)

We instruct the learners to be in groups of six. We make sure that boys and girls and learners of different ages are mixed to ensure maximum participation) (Mtuza, February 10, 16).

Another teacher also viewed that a group should be smaller in size and stated:

(Gulu lisamapilire ana okhalapo 10. Azikhala 6 mpaka 7 kapena 8 pa gulu ndi cholinga chokuti ali yense azitenga mbali. Ngati gulu lakula kwambiri ana ena samachita participate ndipo saphunzira zenizeni).

A group size should not be more than 10. There should be 6-7 or 8 learners per group to make sure that everyone takes part in the group discussions. Large groups stifle the participation of learners and hence learning in the real sense does not happen) (Chingwapi, February 16, 2016.

Basing on the sentiments of Mtuza and Chingwapi, a group should be composed of a reasonable number of learners. The former settled for six learners per group and the latter viewed a conducive group size to range from 6 to 8 but should not be more than 10. From the teachers' experiences, small group size is preferred to a large one mostly because it maximizes the participation of all learners and hence fosters learning.

Paradoxically, during lesson observation, it was noted that the groups were of varied sizes in each and every class. Some groups had as low as 3 members while others as high as 12 in the same classroom. Furthermore, it was noted that there were larger number of learners in a class in urban schools than in rural schools. The large number of learners resulted in large group sizes as high as 16 learners per group. For instance, the following group size was observed in one of the classes:

group size was as high as 11 but yet the class size was not very large and there was abundant space in the classroom to accommodate more groups. The large groups made the teacher not to notice the slow learners who needed remedial assistance. Some of the learners were not really participating (Mtuza, February 10, 2016).

It was noted that some of the learners that were seated in the large groups were not participating fully while others became very dominant. Those that were not participating

fully hid under the cover of other learners in the group. When such group presented brilliant points, even those that did not participate were rewarded since they belonged to that group although in fact they had not participated in the learning process.



Figure 1: Picture showing large group size in Mr. Phatamphi's class (February, 12, 2016).

4.3.2 Composition of groups based on gender

This section presents teachers' practices regarding composition of groups based on gender. Almost all the participants reported that they form student groups by taking into account the sex of the learners. They reported that they mix boys and girls so that they should support each other to ensure maximum participation. One of the teachers had this to say:

(Timaphatikiza anyamata ndi atsikana, ana olimbikira ndi amanyazi pamodzi kuti azikokana. Anyamata ndi atsikana azikhala pagulu limodzi kuti participation ipite patsogolo. Ku SES timalimbikitsa za gender).

We mix boys and girls; active and shy learners so that they should support each other. Girls should be mixed with boys to promote participation. We put emphasis on gender in Social and Environmental Sciences (Nathero, February 9, 2016).

Another participant also echoed that a group should be of mixed gender and had this to say:

(Sitinganene gulu lija pakhole anyamata okha okha kapena atsikana okhaokha, ana 6 kapena 7 anyamata okhaokha kapena atsikana okha okha zimenezo timachita discourage. Timafuna kuti atsikana ndi anyamata azipezeka pagulu limodzi. Atsikana azimasuka kupereka fundo anyamata ali pomwepo komanso anyamata azimasuka kupereka mayankho atsikana ali pomwepo. Azikhala mixed).

We cannot form a group of boys or girls only. All the 6 or 7 learners in a group cannot be of single sex only. We make sure that boys and girls are found in each and every group. We want girls to be free to air out their views in the presence of boys and boys to give their responses in the presence of girls as well. Boys and girls should be mixed in a group) (Mtuza, February, 10, 2016).

From what these two participants reported, it means mixed gender groups were perceived as the best composition as they increase interaction and participation of learners. In so doing both sexes learn to work together freely by following principles of gender balance taught in Social and Environmental Sciences.

Contrary to what the teachers said during semi-structured interviews about the formation of gender-mixed groups, it was noted during lesson observation that some groups were composed of one sex only. Mixed gender was observed on few groups. Other groups had a mixture of boys and girls, but highly gender-skewed. For instance, Phatamphi's class had 9 boys and 3 girls in one group and another one had 8 girls and 3 boys. It was also

observed in some of the groups that the learners were seated in such a way that boys were on their own side and girls on the other side facing each other. During post-lesson observation interviews, some teachers reported that some of the groups were formed by the learners themselves with little intervention from them. The teachers reported that sociocultural contexts hindered the formation of gender mixed groups. The teachers further reported that according to the culture of the area girls do not like seating together with boys except during rare occasions. Such kinds of group formation affected active participation because not much interactive process took place among the learners.



Figure 2: Picture showing a group composed of boys only, yet there were many girls in the classroom (Chingwapi's learners, February, 16, 2016)



Figure 3: Picture showing a group composed of girls only, yet there were many boys in the classroom (Chingwapi's learners, February, 16, 2016).

As noted from the two pictures from Chingwapi's lesson, some groups were composed of single sex only. Groups that were composed of different sexes acted as an impetus to maximum participation of the learners. It was also noted that mixed gender ensured that the responses to the group tasks were diverse in nature as opposed to those from single-gender groups.

Paradoxically, during lesson observation, it was noted that girls were more active than boys during group work activities. Some boys were misbehaving during group work sessions. Teachers expressed the same phenomena during semi structured interviews that girls were more participative than boys during the time of group work. This has indicated

that if girls are left in their own group, they can work much better without any disturbance from boys. For instance, one of the teachers had this to say:

(amene amalimbikira kwambiri pa group work ndi atsikana than anyamata. Atsikana amakhala cooperative and willing to learn during group work. Anyamata ambiri amapanga disturb pa group ndipo sapitirizanso sukulu).

the ones that participates more during group work are girls than boys. Girls are cooperative and willing to learn during group work. Many boys disturb group work activities and most of them drop out of school (Mome, February 24, 2016).

4.3.3 Group composition based on ability

Almost all the participants reported that they form student groups by taking into account the ability of the learners. They mix fast and slow learners so that they may assist each other. For instance on the question of how teachers form the learners' groups, one of them had this to say:

(Timaonanso ability ya ophunzira kuti kodi awa amakhoza kwambiri komanso amene amatenga nthawi kuti amvetse lesson. Ndiye timawachita mix kuti azithandizana. Amene ali active wo aziphunzira kuchokera kwa anzawo asali active)

We look at the ability of the learners and we mix fast and slow learners so that they should assist each other. This helps slow learners to learn from those that are very active (Nwikhwondi, February 16, 2016).

Another participant expressed similar sentiments and had this to say:

(Timaganiziranso kusakaniza ma fast ndi ma slow learners kuti azithandizana ndiponso izi zimapepusa ntchito ya mphunzitsi)

Mixing fast and slow learners to assist one another is taken into account and this simplifies the work of the teacher (Nathero, February 9, 2016).

Although, Nwikhwondi and Nathero expressed statements with different wording but they point to one thing which is formation of mixed ability groups. From the teachers'

sentiments, it means mixed ability groups help learners to assist each other. Fast learners are able to scaffold the slow learners. Even, during lesson observation, it was confirmed that some members of the different groups were very active in contributing correct points and were assisting their friends.

4.3.4 Fixed groups

All the participants expressed concern that they were advised by Ministry officials to form fixed groups in the classroom. They lamented that group work is not the only method used in Social and Environmental Sciences. Teachers complained that some learners keep on turning their heads to look onto the chalkboard. One of the teachers during semi structured interviews had this to say:

(We were told by the education authorities to put learners in fixed groups, ndiye ife timangotsatira zomwe anatiuza, koma sitingamaphunzitse kugwiritsa ntchito group work nthawi zonse, tikatero sitingamalize syllabus. Zimatikhuza kuti ana amakhala akutembenuza makosi awo kuti aone zili pabolodi).

We were told by the education authorities to put learners in fixed groups, so we simply followed the advice they gave us. However, we cannot use group work method all the time because we want to cover the syllabus. We are concerned that learners keep on swaying their heads to look onto the board when they are seated in fixed groups (Nwikhwondi, February 16, 2016).

This simply means that teachers are not comfortable with fixed groups as looking onto the chalkboard become a challenge to some learners. This is so because the chalkboard is considered as the main teaching and learning resource in Malawi and therefore its use is indispensable and inevitable. Social and Environmental Sciences textbooks are not adequate as such the chalkboard is used for writing notes on for all learners to copy.

It was also noted during lesson observation that learners were seated in fixed groups in almost all the classes. Learners were not very comfortable when looking on the chalkboard as they were always swaying their heads i.e. the seating them in the groups made some of the learners not to face directly on the chalkboard. During the time of reporting and consolidation, some of the learners that were not facing the direction of the chalk board were feeling uncomfortable when they were trying to look onto the front. Although the learners were seated in fixed groups, group work method was not used in all the lessons. Group work method was used sparingly and so fixed groups are deemed as irrelevant. Below is a picture showing learners in a fixed group swaying their heads to look on the chalkboard:



Figure 4: Picture showing learners swaying their heads in a fixed group (Nwikhwondi's class, February 16, 2016).

Even document analysis revealed that most of the lesson plans prepared by the teachers did not take on board the use of group work method. Some of the teachers confessed that although some of their past lesson plans indicated the use of group work method but they did not use the method on the actual teaching and learning process.

As noted in the foregoing discussion, there was a contradiction between the teachers' beliefs and actions on the issue of group size. The teachers believed in having a group of a small size of around six, which the Ministry of Education recommends. However, some of the groups were small and others were large in size. According to Bourdieu's thinking tools (Bourdieu, 1990) it means that some of the teachers have the cultural capital, that is, knowledge of effective group sizes basing on what they said during semi-structured interviews but the field, that is, overcrowded classrooms made them not to maintain the recommended group sizes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The teachers lacked the cultural capital (skill) of how to form the effective group size in an overcrowded classroom. It can also be said that the teachers failed to maintain correct group sizes due to negligence as some of the groups were small in size and others were large in size in the same classroom.

However, group size has an effect on individual performance popularly known as the 'ringelmann effect' (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012). Ringelmann effect has an implication on the performance of individual group members as their participation decreases with increasing group size' (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012). Davies (2009) contends that there is an inverse relationship between the size of a group, and the

magnitude of a group member's individual contribution to the accomplishment of the task. Group size affects outcomes in terms of performance and practicability (Watkins, 2012). Parker (2004) and Mhango (2008) proposed that active participatory classroom activities must aim at helping students to deliberate in groups, express their opinions of life issues, and make decisions together. This failed to occur in groups that were so large in size.

In addition, the participants failed to notice the learners that were not participating fully in the large groups. It means, therefore, that large group size blinded the teachers to identify slow learners that could be given the necessary scaffolding and remedial work. Watkins (2012) observes that the larger the group is, the less likely reduced effort by some of the members is to be noticed. If the reduced effort is not noticed by the teacher, it implies that such learners may not receive the necessary remedial support. In addition, Howe (1997) indicated that where scaffolding is in operation, the teacher can only interact with one child or a very small group of children at a time and the likelihood of preferred interactions may take place. This implies that scaffolding was not done successfully in some of the groups where the group size was so large.

Furthermore, the large group size weakened the cooperation of the group members. This was evidenced by the weak participation of some of the members in the large groups. Watkins (2012) argues that smaller groups have process advantages over larger ones in terms of greater cohesion, less tension and increased motivation to co-operate. Kutnick et al. (2005) report that small groups of 4 to 8 pupils are the recommended size for the

pursuit of cooperative and collaborative tasks whereas Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998) support group sizes of four to five students as they believe that larger groups restrict members' participation and so provide less opportunities for them to increase their skills.

The study findings also revealed that teachers supported mixed gender groups. However, mixed gender was not maintained due to the fact that some groups were formed by the learners themselves with little intervention from the teacher. Using the lens of Bourdieu's thinking tools (Bourdieu, 1990), it means that the teachers have the cultural capital, that is, knowledge of effective groups based on gender as per their utterances during semi structured interviews. However, the teachers' and learners' beliefs and attitude (habitus) relating to socio-cultural factors made them not to maintain mixed-gender group sizes in the classroom (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

In the same vein, Mhango (2008) also found in his study that socio-cultural backgrounds blindfolded both teachers and students' when it came to group formation as there were clear patterns of all boys or girls groups and sometimes the groups were a mixture of boys and girls, but highly gender-skewed in the classrooms. Kutnick et al. (2005) found that where pupil groupings are not constructed by teachers, pupils will choose their own grouping based on friendship that will be mainly single sex dominated. However, Blatchford et al. (2007) assert that if group work is to be effective, pupils must be able to work in a socially inclusive manner with all other members of their class and not be dominated by same-gender and friendship preference groups. Wilkinson and Fung (2002)

observed that gender may serve as ‘diffuse status characteristics’ that influence interaction and learning in cooperative small groups.

Paradoxically, girls were more active than boys during group work activities. Some boys also misbehaved during group work activities. Blatchford et al. (2007) contend that pupils, particularly boys, can misbehave during group work. This illuminates that mixed-gender groups are not wholly effective. Using the lens of Bourdieu’s thinking tools (Bourdieu, 1990), it means that teachers should have versatile cultural capital that can make both sexes to coexist in a group in order to promote necessary interaction conducive to knowledge construction. Hughes (2007) contends that single-sex groups gives students the opportunity to learn in an environment free from other-sex distractions. By separating the sexes, teachers have a better chance of meeting the learning needs of boys and girls (Swain & Harvey, 2002). This reflects the study by Boaler (1997) titled ‘impact of different forms of grouping on individuals according to gender’ which revealed that girls prefer co-operative, and supportive group work environments where as boys work well in competitive environments.

The findings also indicated that, teachers formed mixed ability groups so that fast learners should be able to support slow learners. Using the lens of thinking tools of Bourdieu (1990), this illustrates that teachers to a larger extent are able to use their habitus, that is, experience and cultural capital (knowledge and skills) in forming mixed-ability groups to promote teaching and learning in the classroom.

Although, teachers preferred mixed ability groups, such type of groups have their own pros and cons. Often times teachers prefer mixed ability groups because they think that by doing so, they will meet the learner's needs (Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2003). However, it can be destructive to those with low ability as regards to their slow pace and the embarrassment it brings in such groups (Morrow et al., 2003). Altinyelken (2010) observed that when high-achievers were grouped with low achievers, they were not challenged enough, and they also got distracted and performed worse over time. This can make the fast learners to become bored during group work activities. Mizrachi et al. (2010) also reported that teachers expressed concern, that high-achieving pupils sometimes become bored with group work activities.

However, fast learners in mixed ability groups can help the teacher in scaffolding. Mizrachi et al. (2010) observed further that teachers in some schools reported that in the context of group work emphasized in their lessons they have observed high-achieving students more often helping low-achieving students. Kutnick et al. (2005) contend that teaching one another can be beneficial in mixed-ability groups that include pupils who are gifted and talented to assist the slow ones. Equally important is that there should be moderate discrepancies between group members' individual capabilities in order to increase the 'Köhler effect' which occur when weaker members work harder than they would do individually in order to avoid being responsible for a weak group performance (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012).

It was also noted in the findings that teachers do not like fixed groups as they make learners to be uncomfortable whenever they want to look on the chalkboard. In addition, group work is used sparingly contrary to the demands of the SES curriculum. According to Bourdieu (1990), this entails that the teachers' deeply rooted habitus of chalk and talk styles of teaching and learning are in conflict with the paradigm shift to fixed groups in the field (classroom). Dunn and Rakes (2011) contend that teachers' resistance is partially caused by their preoccupied beliefs (habitus) based on past teacher-centered educational experiences. This validates research findings by Nykiel-Herbert (2004) which revealed that, in various African countries, the change of seating arrangement in classrooms is the first and in some cases the only sign that the teachers are implementing group work method. Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall, and Pell (1999) also found that children were most often found seated in small groups for up to 80% of their classroom time while being assigned individual tasks.

Blatchford et al. (2005) lament that the concern for the current use of group work method in the majority of primary classrooms is that children sit in groups but rarely interact and work as groups. Zeki and Güneyli (2014) assert that even though, learner centered educational practices have been recommended because of the positive impact that these practices have made on student learning and understanding, there is still a lack of substantial learner centered change in classrooms. However, Bourdieu (2004) argues that habitus is a never-ending process of construction, with individuals' biographies and stocks of capital in constant tension or alignment with the field. However, entry to a new field (classroom composed of fixed groups) can be seen as providing the opportunity for

habitus (belief in teacher centred methods) to change as individuals are confronted by the unfamiliar (use of fixed groups) (Davey, 2009). However, the attempt to use the fixed groups though not fully, reflects that teachers' habitus of chalk and talk styles of teaching are changing in response to learner centred teaching.

4.4 Organisation of group work activities

This theme looks at teachers' practices regarding the organization of group work activities. The first part looks at the procedure for organising group work and the second part presents the need for training in the organization of group work.

4.4.1 Procedure for group work method

All the participants plan and organize group work activities in Social and Environmental Sciences by following almost similar steps. Most of the participants stated that group work starts with planning. They plan by writing a scheme of work and lesson plan. The lesson plan stipulates all the steps to be followed when using group work method. In the actual classroom, group work is organized by asking the learners to do the group tasks. Teachers facilitate the construction of knowledge during the course of group work activity by monitoring the group tasks. Then the learners are asked to report their work. Then the teachers consolidate and evaluate the group work by explaining the points in detail. For instance, during semi structured interviews, one of the teachers had this to say:

(Timapanga group work potsatira njira izi; poyambilira penipeni aphunzitsi ayenera aonetsetse kuti alemba scheme ndi lesson plan. Akafika mu phunziro, ana ayenera akhale mmagulu awo, kenako kuwapatsa ntchito yoti akambirane, basitu ndi kuwapatsa nthawi yoti akambirane. Then anawo azachite report zomwe akambirana. Reporting

is done by group representatives. Basi kumapeto ndimafotokozero in detail).

Group work method is conducted by following these steps: writing of scheme of work and a lesson plan, putting the learners in groups, letting the learners do the group activities, then ask the learners to report their work. The reporting is done by the group representative, and then I consolidate by explaining the points in detail (Nathero, February 9, 2016)

Another participant had this to say:

(Poyamba timaika ana pagulu, kenaka akafika pagulu timawapatsa task, lero tikambirana zakutizakuti, akakambirana., timawauza achite report, ndipo alembe ma points pa bolodi, kenako timakhala ndi discussion, ndiye timapanga summary ndikuthandizira ngati ma points ena sali bwino).

Firstly, putting learners in groups, giving them the task or topic to discuss, and then they should report by writing the points on the chalkboard, then the whole class have to discuss, and then we make a summary and remove irrelevant points (Mtubwa, February 10, 2016).

Although, Mtubwa did not indicate the writing of schemes of work and lesson plan as Nathero did, there is identical pattern which is followed when organizing group work during the actual lesson. The pattern which is followed in the organisation of group work in the classroom is group discussion, reporting and consolidation of the task.

Even document analysis showed that the teachers' lesson plans followed similar steps when it came to the use of group work method. For instance, one of the teacher's lesson plan followed the following steps:

Table 2 : Part of Social and Environmental Sciences lesson plan

<i>Teacher's activities</i>	<i>Learners' activities</i>
<i>Step1:- let the learners brainstorm the socio-economic institutions</i>	<i>-brainstorming the socio-economic institutions</i>
<i>Step2:- let the learners get into their groups</i> <i>-let the learners discuss the socio-economic institutions</i>	<i>-getting into groups</i> <i>-discussing the socio-economic institutions</i>
<i>Step3:- let the learners present their work to class for discussion</i>	<i>presenting the work to class for discussion</i>

Source: Phatamphi's lesson plan, February 11, 2016.

However, it was found that the preparation of lesson plans was not done well in terms of using group work method. The lesson plans were very sketchy. They did not specify how teaching, learning and assessment resources would be used during group work to act as a catalyst to the construction of knowledge. Reporting, evaluation and consolidation were not clearly indicated on how they would be carried out. Time limit for the various steps was not indicated. All the teachers' lesson plans showed that they were simply suggested lesson instructions copied from the Teacher's guide. They were copied as steps in the lesson plan without consideration of whether they would be followed or not. For instance, one of the teacher's lesson indicated use of a resource person as a catalyst to the use of group work method but yet during the actual lesson, there was no resource person.

Likewise, in all the lessons observed, it was noted that all the participants followed identical steps when organizing group work method in the classroom. For instance, this is an excerpt from one of the teachers:

Teacher: *In your groups discuss the countries affected by hot desert climate.*

Learners: (discussing group work)

Teacher: (Teacher supervised group work by going around assisting learners).

Teacher: *One person from each group should come in front and present the work*

Learners: (reported their group work)

Teacher: (explained the points reported by learners in detail)

(Nwikhwondi, February, 18, 2016).

As observed in this excerpt, the teacher started with asking the learners to do group work tasks. Then the teacher supervised the groups. After some time, the teacher asked the learners to report their work and finally the teachers consolidated the work.

However, in the course of supervision, instead of assisting the learners in the groups to construct knowledge, some teachers provided already constructed answers to learners or allowed the learners to copy the responses from the text books. Other teachers supervised the groups for few minutes and then sat down without providing further assistance.

It was also found that all the teachers followed almost the same pattern of asking learners to come in front to present their work, and then the teacher came in to consolidate the work. However, the biggest challenge was that the groups were almost reporting similar work. After the first group reported their work, the subsequent groups were left with nothing to report. This was mostly due to the fact that most of the groups were copying

the responses from the learners' book. However, because there were some other points discussed by the learners without necessarily being copied from the text books, then all the groups were allowed to report.

In addition, most of the teachers did not evaluate group work activities effectively. Most of the teachers did not have time to evaluate or scrutinise the points reported by the groups. This ended up taking some irrelevant points as correct. For instance, one of the teachers on the group task of 'discussing how self-government was important to the people of Africa' simply said that all the points generated and reported are correct but yet other points were not correct e.g.

*Learner: 'helps to do anything',
'helps to promote budget'*
(Pwathenrwa, February 9, 2016)

The following excerpt also showed lack of proper evaluation of group work:

Teacher: *have you finished discussing, paste what you discussed on the walls.*
Learners: (pasting their work on the walls)
Teacher: *this marks the end of our lesson for today*
(Learners were not given chance to talk anything on their work posted on the walls) (Mtuza, February, 10, 2016).

In the first excerpt, Pwathenrwa accepted even wrong answers without evaluating them properly. In the second excerpt, Mtuza neither evaluated nor consolidated the group task. This implies that group work tasks are not evaluated effectively.

4.4.2 The need for training in the organisation of group work

During semi-structured interviews the teachers reported that their practices on the use of group work method require some training for it to be done successfully. They reported that at other times they do attend workshops at the Teacher Development Centre (TDC), and most of the activities are done in groups, so they learn from that but that is not enough. The teachers also lamented that Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) do not supervise standard eight lessons as their focus is in the junior section. They also expressed concern that more in-service training opportunities are needed as some of them were trained in the past when group work was mainly emphasized in the languages and not in Social and Environmental Sciences. For instance, in this current study, one of the teachers had this to say:

(Training is needed because things are changing as we were trained in the past. I was trained in the 1990s ndiye pakati apa pabwera zinthu zachilendo zambiri zofunika training. Group work nthawi yathu amachita emphasise kuti tizikaigwiritsa ku ma language subjects)

Training is needed because things are changing as we were trained in the past. I was trained in the 1990s and so many things have changed requiring in service training. Group work, during our college time, was being emphasised in the teaching of language subjects (Phatamphi, February 12, 2016).

Another participant echoed this:

(Enafe tinatuluka ku college kale mchaka cha 1986 ndiye panafunikira ma refresher courses kapenanso tima training tina take pamene curriculum ikusinthidwa).

Refresher courses and in service training are needed whenever there is a change of curriculum. I graduated from college many years ago in 1986 (Chingwapi, February 16, 2016).

All the above instances tell a story that most teachers are not equipped with proper training for the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

The study findings have indicated that teachers organise group work by following similar steps like doing a group task, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the group task. However, such steps were not done well to promote learning. By using Bourdieu's thinking tools, it means the teachers lacked proper cultural tools to organize group work well (DiGiorgio, 2010). Knowledge and skills are paramount to the effective use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

In this study teachers have displayed identical deficiencies on how they can use group work proficiently. This problem has stemmed from how the lesson plans were developed. Reporting, evaluation and consolidation were not clearly indicated on how they will be carried out in the lesson plans. Mintah (2014) observed that to conduct group work method effectively, there is need for adequate preparation and planning by the teacher. Calderhead (1993) observed that teachers' lesson planning depends much on the teachers' creativity in blending the theories they learned during their preparation program and the actual situations they encounter in their classrooms.

It was also noted that supervision of group work activities was not done well. Supervision and monitoring of activities were done hurriedly without providing the necessary scaffolding. Some of the teachers supervised the learners for a short time and then sat down while the learners were doing the group tasks. When using group work, there is

need to have a clear strategy for supervision (Morrow et al., 2003). In support, Mtunda and Safuli (1986) contend that the teacher should explain the group task to learners, then move around to supervise the progress of learners.

It was also observed that instead of assisting the learners in the groups to construct knowledge, the learners in some of the classes were simply copying the responses from their text books without discussing. Pressley (2006) contends that good primary school teachers understand that their lessons are only a start in the knowledge construction process; hence, require a lot of scaffolding before the learners are able to own the skills.

The study findings also indicated that reporting and evaluation of group tasks was not done well. The way groups reported their work was that each and every group presented almost similar findings. Watkins (2012) observed that when there are a large number of groups presenting reports on their discussion, it can be very boring for students to listen to each group's presentation and they are likely to pay minimal attention. In addition, Davies (2009) advises that it is much better to evaluate an individual's contribution to the group work assignment as well as the work of the group.

The findings have also indicated that teachers lack proper training on the organization of group work in Social and Environmental Sciences. This validates what Chulu and Chiziwa (2010) found in that where group work activities are suggested, there is limited guidance as how group work method can be made more effective. This means that Bourdieu's cultural capital which are the knowledge and skills are important to any

practice (DiGiorgio, 2009) and absence of them can make teachers' practices of the use of group work method to be ineffective. Davey (2009) contends that in developing habitus to encompass cultural capital, layers of knowledge and experience provide the individual with the tools for change. This entails that the teachers' habitus of using teacher centred methods could be developed to embrace the use of group work method with capacity building (cultural tools) on the use of the method. According to Bourdieu (1990), this problem emanated from lack of economic capital (monetary resources) to organise in service training for teachers on the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences in order to improve their practices.

This authenticates the research carried out in seven member countries of the African Social studies Programme (ASSP) which indicated that although participatory methods like group work are advocated in education circles, classroom teaching and learning activities are teacher driven and dominated by the chalk-and- talk (teacher centred) styles of teaching because teachers are not properly trained on the use of these methods (Harber, 1997). However, research findings in Turkey revealed that introduction of participatory methods such as group work method at a moderate adaptive pace while taking on board training of teachers has led to a great use of the approaches (Mohammad & Harlech-Jones, 2009).

4.5 Categories of group tasks

This theme looks at teachers' practices regarding the development of different categories of group tasks. It dwells on three areas namely: tasks that allow all learners to make contributions, tasks that demanded to reproduce content that was in the learners' book and tasks lacking a base for group discussion.

4.5.1 Tasks that allow all learners to make contributions

All the participants said that they use group tasks that allow all learners to make contributions during discussions. Most of them reported that apart from being directed by the teacher's guide to use group work on a particular topic, they also look at the task if it can allow all learners to make comments on it. For instance, one of the teachers had this to say:

(Timaonanso topic ngati ili yobweretsa mfundo zambiri pokambirana ndiye kuti imeneyo ndi yoyenera groupwork chifukwa aliyense angatengepo mbali).

We look at the nature of the topic i.e. if a topic can lead to the generation of more points is fit for group work method so that every group member can participate (Mome, February 24, 2016).

Another participant had this to say:

(If learners have knowledge pa chinthuncho. Timaonera kuchuluka kwa ntchito ndipo ngati ili yambiri timaigawa ntchito m'magulu kuti achite different activities and then exchange the work during presentations)

If learners have prior knowledge on the activity. We look at the amount of work, if it is huge, we divide it amongst the groups and then exchange the work during presentations (Nwikhwondi, February 16, 2016).

Both Mome and Nwikhwondi's sentiments though expressed differently but they both point at the use of group tasks that involve all learners in the process of constructing

knowledge. In addition, learners are able to make contributions to such group tasks because they have experiences pertaining to the tasks.

During lesson observation, it was indeed noted that some of the participants took on board tasks that allowed all learners in the group to make contributions. The tasks were accompanied by catalysts like illustrations that assisted learners to base their discussions on. For instance, a lesson excerpt of one of the participants had this:

Teacher: (distributes one Atlas to each of the fixed groups in the
classroom)

Teacher: *In your groups study the map of the world and identify the
major climates of the world.*

Learners: (all learners were discussing basing on the map)
(Nwikhwondi, February 16, 2016)

In this excerpt, Nwikhwondi used map of the world showing world climates to assist learners in the discussions. This made the group discussions to be effective as all group members were able to make contributions.

Paradoxically, it was also noted during lesson observation that some of the participants used group tasks that compelled few learners to dominate and others to be recessive. This was so because the nature of the tasks required only one or two persons in the group to do them. In other words, such tasks were deficient of a good number of points to be contributed and discussed by all the learners in a group. This resulted in making the other group members to stay idle. The teachers tried to no avail to tell learners in the groups that the activity should not be dominated by one person. However, few learners per group

still dominated in the activity as the task did not allow the participation of more members. For instance, one of the teachers instructed learners like this:

Teacher: in groups, draw 'map of Malawi showing mission stations from your learners' books (Mtuza, February 10, 2016).

This task only demanded the learners to draw map that was already provided in the learners' books. The nature of this task is that it can be done by one learner. The teacher tried to no avail to tell learners in the groups that the activity should not be dominated by one person.

4.5.2 Tasks that demanded to reproduce content that was in the learners' book

Some of the group tasks did not lead to the construction of new knowledge. Such group tasks demanded to reproduce content that was in the text books. This made the groups copy the points from the learners' books without engaging in a serious group discussion. Teachers believed that they were giving group work while in the actual fact the learners simply regurgitated the notes that were in their textbooks. The following is an excerpt from one of the participants when teaching 'the advantages and disadvantages of Nyasaland as a British colony':

Teacher: In your groups discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Nyasaland as a British colony
Students: (Learners quickly open their text books and started copying)

Teacher: Now, report your group work (Pwathenrwa, February, 4, 2016).

What happened in this excerpt is that instead of discussing, the learners simply opened their books and copied the responses to the task. What was needed was that the available text should be used as a catalyst to build further knowledge so that learning should take place.

4.5.3 Group tasks lacking a base for group discussion

It was also found that learners lacked some knowledge on some of the group tasks. Most of the teachers cited history topics as those that are new to learners because they happened in the past. One of the teachers had this to say:

(Pali ma topic ena achilendo kwa ana monga ma topic ambiri a history. Izi zinachitika kale sakudziziwa ndiye angakambirane bwanji pagulu?)

Learners have no knowledge on some of the group tasks like most history topics are new to learners as the events happened in the past. So how can they discuss something that is remote to their experiences? (Pwathenrwa, February 9, 2016).

Another teacher had this to say:

(‘there are some topics okuti chikhalirecho ana sanayambe aamvapo ndiye kukambirana kwache kumavuta, for example on the topic “ groups of people in Africa”, if you tell learners to discuss in groups the characteristics of the Semites people, zimavuta , ana amangokhala kumangokuyang’ana’)

there are some topics which are very new to learners. So to discuss such topics it’s difficult. For example on the topic “groups of people in Africa”, if you tell learners to discuss in groups the characteristics of the Semites people, it’s difficult because learners simply look at the teacher without discussing anything (Mome, February 24, 2016).

Both Pwathenrwa and Mome reported that learners have no knowledge on some group tasks. This as a result brings down the participation of the learners.

Likewise, lesson observation revealed that teachers instructed learners to do group tasks that lacked a base which learners can use to construct knowledge. Most of the teachers simply instructed learners to discuss a concept or topic in groups without using a case study, illustration or any catalyst to connect the learners to their real life experience. This was more problematic in history topics that seemed to be remote to the learners' experiences. For instance, one of the teachers simply instructed learners to do group activity without using any base for the discussions like this:

Teacher: discuss how self-government was important to the people of Africa (Pwathenrwa, February 9, 2016).

Another lesson observation excerpt had this:

Teacher: discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Nyasaland as a British colony (Nathero, February, 4, 2016).

As observed from the lesson excerpts of Pwathenrwa and Nathero, the group tasks lacked a base for the discussions. As a result, some teachers went to the extent of giving the expected responses to the learners in the groups after noting that they were completely failing to come up with the required points. This stemmed from the lesson plan as neither illustrations, case studies nor other resources were stated in the lesson steps and how they would be used to construct knowledge.

As noted in the findings, teachers reported that they used group tasks that allow all learners to make contributions. It was observed in the actual lessons that indeed some teachers used tasks that allow all learners to take part. According to Bourdieu (2004), it means that teachers' practices to come up with better group tasks was likely shaped by cultural capital (skills and knowledge of the use of group work method in SES) and

economic tools (monetary resources to foster some in service trainings on group work). However, it was also observed that other teachers used tasks that required only one or two successful members of a group to contribute while the rest of the group members stay idle. According to Bourdieu (2004), this meant that the teachers had deficient cultural capital (knowledge, skill and experiences) to develop better group tasks that could allow all group members to participate. In this case, the deficient cultural capital to come up with better group tasks hindered teachers' practices on the effective use of group work method in SES.

Watkins (2012) recommends that teachers should use conjunctive tasks, where each group member has to contribute and thus more group learning takes place. Conjunctive tasks require each member to contribute to an assessed task (Ruel et al., 2003). Schulz-Hardt and Brodbeck (2012) contend that whereas in a disjunctive task one successful member can be enough to solve the task, a conjunctive task requires all group members to be successful for the group to solve the task. Watkins (2012) observe that such kind of disjunctive tasks are unsuitable for group work as they can be achieved by only one successful person in a group. They are unsuitable for group work assessment exercises in the sense that the productivity of the group depends on the productivity of the performance of the best group member (Davies, 2009; Ruel et al., 2003; Watkins, 2012). Consequently, they foster and encourage 'freeriding' which occurs when group members reduce their effort because their individual contribution seems to have little impact on the group (Schulz-Hardt & Brodbeck, 2012).

It was also noted in the findings that some of the group tasks did not lead to the construction of new knowledge as they demanded to reproduce content that was in the teacher's guide and learners' book. Such tasks made learners to copy the notes in the text books without participation in a serious group discussion. According to Bourdieu (1985), this is indicative that the teachers were deficient of cultural tools to assist them to come up with better group tasks that can foster cooperative construction of knowledge. The teachers' practices were mostly dependent on the knowledge acquired from teacher training programmes they attained some years back which were not fully relevant to the changing field of education where curricula keep on changing. No wonder, Davey (2009) contends that cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications will be worth more or less at different times and in different places, hence the need for capacity building in order for one to become relevant to the changing terrain of the field of education.

This is in contrast to the essence of group work which is to help learners work cooperatively to construct knowledge through sharing ideas and experiences (Mtunda & Safuli, 1986). Bentley, Fleury, and Garrison (2007) state that constructivism entails learning through building knowledge cooperatively through social interaction and application of prior knowledge in a continual interpretation of on-going experiences, which is in no way related to mere copying and regurgitation of already developed text. However, Mhlauli (2010) observed that textbooks in schools are seen as authority and teachers 'rely' heavily on them. Annyu (2000) observed that when teachers use textbooks, they are usually not creative in their teaching, they teach everything

according to the set textbooks either verbatim, which fail to take the students' level of understanding into account. This has implications on the capability of learners that will be produced in schools as they may not be able to solve problems that affect humanity.

The findings have also indicated that some teachers used group tasks that lacked a base or prior knowledge which learners can use to construct knowledge. According to Bourdieu (1990), it means that schools (the field) lack economic capital to support in service training of teachers on how they can create a base for discussion on topics that seem to be remote to learners' experiences. Cultural capital on the development of better tasks could help to promote teachers' practices on the use of group work method.

In line with this, Mtunda and Safuli (1986) contend that pictures, charts or illustrations help pupils to build new experiences. Mtunda and Safuli (1986) further gave an example that when teaching about the early civilisation, a series of pictures on the topic will help learners to build new experiences from the pictures observed. In addition, Winstone and Millward (2012) assert that case studies are an effective constructivist teaching tool as their exploration allows students to reach conclusions. For instance, Mr Mome could have used pictures of the Semites people for learners to discuss their characteristics. Thus, if the teacher connect the history topics to the learners experiences, learners are likely to participate fully in the discussions. This validates what Remy, Anderson, and Snyder (1976) observed that the greater the connections between the curriculum and the learners' world, the higher the likelihood that the learners can transfer the classroom experiences to the real life situations. Lack of providing a base to facilitate the group discussions affected active participation because not much interactive process took place

among learners. Thus what, Parker (2004) and Mhango (2008) proposed that active participatory activities must aim at helping students to deliberate in groups and express their opinions, generally failed to take place.

4.6 Development of democratic and citizenship skills

This theme looks at how teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method influence the development of democratic and citizenship skills. The results show that correct practices on the use of group work in Social and Environmental Sciences helps to develop democratic and citizenship skills. On the importance of group work in Social and Environmental Sciences, participants gave varied responses but all of them point to the following: promotion of critical thinking, tolerance, mutual respect, problem solving, team spirit and leadership skills which are essential to citizenship and democracy. Participants also reported that group work makes learners to be busy and active thereby promoting understanding. Shy learners participate fully which hardly happen in a whole class discussion. Interaction is also encouraged between and among teachers and learners. Teachers also gain knowledge from some of the group contributions. For instance one of the teachers on the opportunities of using group work in Social and Environmental Sciences had this to say:

(pogwiritsa ntchito group work imathandiza ana pozama ndi zomwe amaphunzira ku social monga to work as a team, unity and oneness, sharing ideas and even the teacher learns from them, promotion of tolerance, decision making, problem solving, critical thinking and mutual respect among learners and learners understand subject matter better).
group work assist learners to practise and experience what they learn in Social and Environmental Sciences such as team work, unity and oneness, sharing ideas, tolerance, decision making, problem solving,

critical thinking and mutual respect. Learners also understand subject matter much better (Nathero, February 9, 2016).

Another participant echoed:

(Akamakambirana mmagulu ana amakhala active than kumangochita dictate zophunzira. Ana sakhala dormant. Amathandizana pokambirana zomwe zimabweretsa critical thinking and problem solving. Izinso zimangothandizira SES because it also deals with decision making, tolerance and other essential skills).

When learners are discussing in groups, they become active than dictating to them the content. They don't become dormant. They help each other in the discussions which lead to the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills. This also complements SES (Social and Environmental Sciences) as it also deals with decision making, tolerance and other essential skills (Nwikhwondi, February 16, 2016).

Going by the utterances of Nathero and Nwikhwondi, group work indeed offers an opportunity for learners to practise democratic and citizenship skills which are learned in Social and Environmental Sciences. The democratic skills practised are like decision making, tolerance and active participation.

It was also noted during some of the lesson observations that the use of group work method helped learners to demonstrate leadership, cooperation and participation skills which are some of the pillars to democracy and citizenship. Leadership skills were demonstrated when the learners controlled fellow group members from making noise. Some learners were also chosen as group leaders and they led their friends in the discussion. Group work also created an opportunity for learners to interact and have the responsibility of assisting one another thereby creating a sense of cooperation, empathy, problem solving and participation.

In support of this, Harber and Serf (2006) contend that democracy is not genetically inherited as it has to be learned, cultivated and practised for it to prosper. This is to say that learners learn simultaneously democracy in Social and Environmental Sciences and practise it through the use of group work method. According to Bourdieu (1985), it means that transformative habitus and cultural capital on the use of group work method ensued to a conducive environment for the practice of democratic and citizenship skills.

Indeed, group work gives one the opportunity to develop communication, interpersonal skills like respecting other people's ideas, leadership, negotiation, planning, self-awareness, self-confidence, and listening skills (Learning and Information Services, 2014). Malcolm (1997) also asserts that learners can gain experience about democratic principles and processes by practising them in the classroom through cooperative group work. This is in line with the goals of citizenship which is active participation in the society and working cooperatively to achieve a common goal (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). The implication of group work on citizenship is that it marks a departure from the individualistic tendencies among the citizenry of a nation (Mhlauli, 2010; Van Gunsteren, 1998). Thus, Dewey (1986) asserts that learning through interactive experience such as group work involves the formation of good habits which may include good citizenship.

However, if greater care is not taken, group work can work against the parameters of Social and Environment Sciences which is the development of effective citizenry. Group work can foster free riding and social loafing in some learners. That is to say that some learners do not participate fully in the groups but simply get good grades on the sweat of

others. This can eventually nurture the habit of laziness and dependency in learners. In connection to this, Mtunda and Safuli (1986) lament that it is difficult to assess individual performance when using group work. This implies that some learners in the group strive to make sound contributions while others simply get good grades for no meaningful contributions (Davies, 2009). In simpler terms they are parasitic and dependent on other group members who work hard. This as a result nurtures irresponsible citizens who may not be independent economically but simply live on handouts which contravenes the goal of teaching Social and Environmental Sciences.

4.7 English as a medium of classroom instruction during group work

This theme looks at how teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method in SES is affected by the use of English as a medium of classroom instruction. It was found that the state's policies on the use of English as a medium of classroom instruction reduced learners' participation during group work. Learners struggle to discuss and report group work tasks in English fluently. If the discussions are in Chichewa more points are generated than when English is used. Teachers also code switch from English to Chichewa to make the lessons understandable. During semi-structured interviews, Pwathenrwa had this to say:

(There is language barrier as most learners do not understand English. So they don't contribute much during discussions. Amavutikanso pochita report zomwe akambirana mu chingerezi. Komanso mawu ena amapezeka ku SES amakhala a deep okuti samagwiritsidwagwiritsidwa ntchito monga federation, amalgamation, referendum ndi ena otero).

There is language barrier as most learners do not understand English. So they don't contribute much during discussions. They also face difficulties to report their work due lack of fluency in English. In addition some of the words used in Social and Environmental Sciences are jargons such

that they are rarely used such as federation, amalgamation, referendum and many other words (Pwathenrwa, February 9, 2016).

Similarly, another participant had this to say:

(Samamvetsetsa pena ana English samaimva ndiye timawachitira translate. I explain some vocabulary for the learners to understand. Kulankhulana ndi ana mu chingerezi ndi problem because ana amatha kukhala ndi yankho loyenera koma amalephera kuti alankhula bwanji. Ana amalephera kupereka fundo zokwanira mu chingerezi. If it is in Chichewa more points are given. I encourage them to speak English so that they should get used. So I introduced English speaking in my class. Koma vuto ku kalasi kwangako ndimayetsetsa kuti azilankhula English koma akapita ku break ana amakalasi ena samachita. Koma vuto ndilakuti sindilandira support from other teachers and learners from other classes)

Learners do not understand English some times, so I explain or translate some of the vocabulary to enable them understand. Communication in English is a problem i.e. learners may have the correct point to contribute but are hindered by the use of English as medium of instruction. Learners fail to generate more points in English. If it is in Chichewa more points are generated. I encourage them to speak English so that they should get used. So I introduced English speaking in my class. But the problem is that learners from other classes are not encouraged much to speak English. So my learners meet other learners who are not speaking English during break time. Thus the challenge to this initiative is lack of support from other classes (Nwikhwondi, February 16, 2016).

This means that the use of English as a medium of instruction made learners to simply state the points without further explanation or exemplification. This is also compounded by the fact that Social and Environmental Sciences has its own technical words that look like jargons. The jargons were explained in the text books not in the way learners could understand them much better.

Likewise, during lesson observation, it was noted that learners were struggling to discuss issues in English fluently. The learners were combining Chichewa and English for them

to carry out the group discussions and report their work successfully. Whenever, learners were allowed to use Chichewa, their participation increased and when the teacher forced them to use English strictly their participation lowered. Even learners were struggling to report their work in English. Some learners were facing challenges to pronounce some of the words during the time of reporting group activity. Likewise, the teachers were seen code switching from English to Chichewa, vernacular language in order to enable communication to take place between the teacher and the learners. For instance, one teacher expressed code switching between English and the vernacular as follows:

Teacher: in groups, draw 'map of Malawi showing mission stations, ndikuti mukhale mmagulu ndipo mujambule map showing mission stations.

Teacher: (In groups, draw 'map of Malawi showing mission stations)
(Mtuza, February, 10, 2016).

Going by this excerpt, it means teachers firstly explained the points in English and re-explained them in Chichewa later. The aim for that was to promote communication to take place fruitfully.

According to Bourdieu (1990), the language policy entails that the 'rules and norms determining the nature of interaction in the 'field' (education system) are impacting negatively on teachers' practices to use of group work method. Bourdieu (1990) observes that fields are constituted areas of activity with their specific institutions and their own laws of functioning. Nolan (2012) contends that the passive act of wanting to change teachers' habitus is easier said than done when the rules of the school playing field continue to appear unaltered in any significant manner. This language policy made the teachers to be unwilling to change their habitus of using teacher centred methods wholly

to the use of group work method as it was deemed as a waste of time to ask learners to deliberate issues in groups and yet they were failing to do so because of communication problems. However, teachers' habitus can adapt to the policies of the field (use of English) by using 'cultural capital' (knowledge and skills) and 'economic capital' (teaching and learning resources like illustrations) to facilitate the 'practice' (use of group work method).

However, the findings of this study are in line with what other researchers in Malawi have found about the use of English in primary schools. In a study by Mkandawire (2004), it was found that students' participation reduced drastically whenever the class teacher used English as a medium of instruction other than the vernacular. It was also observed by Kaphesi (2001) that the use of local languages in a grade five Mathematics class greatly increased students' participation. Therefore, late introduction of English as the medium of instruction into a society where English is hardly spoken seems to deprive children of a language to construct meaning (Altinyelken, 2010; Storeng, 2001). Vygotsky (1978) argued that the most effective learning environment would provide learners with the ability to explore concepts and discuss their meanings with other learners. One of such abilities is to use the language, the learners are familiar with.

4.8 Teaching and learning resources during group work

This theme looks at how teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method in SES are affected by shortage of resources. It dwells on two areas namely: inadequacy of teaching, learning and assessment resources; and limited space in the classrooms.

4.8.1 Inadequacy of teaching, learning and assessment resources

One of the most common challenges that affected teachers' practices on group work method, were limited or in availability of teaching, learning and assessment resources. Most of the participants expressed that sometimes they receive flip charts, texts books (learners' books) and atlases that assist them during group work but they are not adequate. One of the teachers in this study had this to say:

(Timagwiritsa bolodi, makope ndi mapepala koma ang'ono malo mwa mapepala ama chart omwe amakhala aakulu. Komabe kugwiritsa ntchito bolodi kumatayitsa nthawi chifukwa mphunzitsi kapena mwana amalemba ma points nthawi ya presentation. Pomwe chart mumukhala kuti mwalembatu mumangochimata nthawi ya presentation basi).

We use chalk board, exercise books, and small papers as resources to take the place of charts. However, the use of the chalk board is time consuming as the teacher is required to write the things during presentation. If chart papers are available, the points are written during the time of group discussion and during presentation the chart papers are simply posted on the walls (Mtubwa, February 10, 2016).

In support, another participant had this to say:

(Timakumana ndi problem ya kusowa kwa ma flipcharts and petal markers ndi ma resources ena. Si ma resources onse amene mphunzitsi angachite improvise ayi. Komanso malo osungiramo ma resources ndi ochepa. Izi zimabwezeretsa mbuyo zokambirana pagulu. Opanda ma resources ana amasowa chowathandizira kuti apeze yankho ku zomwe akukambirana).

We face the challenge of lack of flipcharts and petal markers and other resources. It's not every resource that can be improvised. Again, there is limited space to store resources. Lack of resources stifles learners' discussions in the groups. Lack of resources makes learners to lack a base to help them in their discussions (Chingwapi, February, 16, 2016).

These two participants' expressions reflect that resources to promote the use of group work method are in short supply in schools. Shortage of teaching and learning resources

affect group work activities in the sense that learners lack a catalyst to help them find answers to group tasks.

Even document analysis revealed that most of the teachers stated ‘learners’ experience’ and ‘the local environment’ as resources in their schemes of work and lesson plans. Tangible resources were not stated in the lesson plans and scheme of work which was indicative of shortage of resources and failure of the teacher to improvise.

It was also noted during lesson observation that teaching, learning and assessment resources were not adequate in the course of group work activities. Text books and other relevant books were not adequate. In most of the classes, one learners’ text book was shared by all the learners in a group such that others were not able to read the required passage. In other instances, the group work method was even serving the purpose of sharing the few books in the classroom.



Figure 5: Picture of learners in a group sharing one text book [February, 12, 2016].

There was also lack of chart papers which forced the learners or the teacher to write the points being reported on the chalkboard which is time consuming. Chart papers were not available in all the lessons observed. For instance, this is what transpired in one of the teachers' lesson:

Teacher: (distributed small A4 papers to each of the groups)
Teacher: *I have distributed one piece of paper to each group.
Use that to draw map of Malawi showing mission stations.*
Learners: (drawing the map on the small A4 paper)
(Mtuza, February, 2016).

When the papers were posted on the walls, it was noted that learners were not able to read from a far. This is an indication that the teacher was lacking better chart papers

which affected his practices of using group work in SES. This has implications on the teachers' practices of teaching using group work method in SES as resources promote understanding and construction of knowledge.

4.8.2 Limited space in the classrooms

It was also found during lesson observation that space for learners to move around freely during the time of activities was limited and that affected teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES. The classes were small as compared to the number of learners. This problem was rife in urban schools as compared to rural schools. This was so because urban schools had large number of learners as compared to rural schools. The desks were touching each other thereby allowing no space to move around'. For instance, Phatamphi's class had around 175 learners. This forced the teachers to hold their classes outside under a tree. The group work activities were often interrupted by noise from other learners that are on break time.

During semi-structured interviews, teachers also commented that few classroom blocks affect the use of group work method. For instance, on the kind of support the teachers may wish to receive to implement group work method, one of the teachers had this to say:

(Pakhale kuonjezera ma kalasi kuti tichepetse kudzadzana kwa ana)
Increasing classroom blocks so that the classrooms are not overcrowded
(Nathero, February 9, 2016).

Another participant had this to say:

(Tili ndi challenge ya kudzadza kwa makalasi. Ine mukalasi langa muli ana oposa 170. Pena timagawa makalasi awiri. Ndiyenso tili ndi vuto la

kuchepa kwa makalasi. SES imafunika concentration koma akamaphunzira panja, ana amakhala disturbed ndi zambiri kuphatikizapo anzawo akakhala pa break).

We have a challenge of over crowdedness of classes. There are over 170 learners in my class. Sometimes I split them into two classes. This is exacerbated by limited classroom blocks. Social and Environmental Sciences demands concentration such that when lessons are held outside, there are a lot of disturbances including their school mates who are on break time (Phatamphi, February 12, 2016).

This illustrates that group work method require good space but the problem is large number of learners enrolling in schools. This implies that holding classes outside makes learners to lack concentration.

It was noted that scarcity of teaching and learning resources, such as text books and chart papers, affected the teachers' practices of using group work method in SES. This problem of resources is deemed as a lack of economic capital and that affected negatively teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES (DiGiorgio, 2009). Bourdieu's conceptual tools are not stand-alone perspectives (Swartz, 2008) such that failure to provide resources affects teachers practices of using group work method to teach well. Lack of instructional resources to support teachers' practices of using group work method in SES made the teachers, at other times, stick to the habitus of chalk and talk styles of teaching other than group work method.

This concurs with Kishindo et al. (2005) who stated that most classes in Malawi are overcrowded, and teaching and learning materials are in short supply, making it difficult or nearly impossible for learners to get hands-on experience. This authenticates the

study by Chipshiko and Shawa (2014) which revealed acute shortage of textbooks and other teaching and learning resources in primary schools in Malawi which were used in groups of five to ten, which made it difficult for learners to participate fully in the learning process. Ginsburg (2006) contends that student-centered pedagogies like group work method are more challenging when one is working in classrooms with large numbers of pupils and limited instructional resources.

It was also noted that classroom space for learners to move around freely during the time of group work activities was limited. This means that lack of economic capital to construct spacious classroom blocks is impacting negatively on the use of group work method (Bourdieu, 1990; Rawolle & Lingard, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) argued that the most effective learning environment would provide learners with the ability to explore concepts and discuss their meanings with other learners. So in this case, uncondusive environment hindered to some extent the construction of knowledge. This authenticate the study by Chipshiko and Shawa (2014) which found that overcrowded classrooms made it difficult for teachers to come up with good seating arrangement which could promote collaborative and cooperative group work activities.

4.9 High stakes examination as a limitation of the use of group work method in SES

This theme presents how teachers' practices regarding the use of group work method in SES is affected by high stakes examination. It dwells on two areas namely: emphasis on coverage of the syllabus using rote learning methods and time consuming of group work method.

4.9.1 Recall type test items as a limitation of group work method in SES

Most of the participants expressed the concern that Social and Environmental Sciences test items are recall type. They said that such test items influence teachers to use rote learning methods. They also said that Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB) standard eight examinations require responses which are mostly taught through lecture method other than the constructivist approaches. Most of them said that lecture method is in line with most of the question items on MANEB paper as they demand simply recall of information. So it was noted that group work method was used sparingly because of high stakes testing by MANEB. During semi structured interviews one of the teachers had this to say:

(Lecture method imagwirizana ndi zomwe ana atazalembe pa mayeso a MANEB than group work as most of the questions amangofuna kungokumbukira zomwe anaphunzura kale)

Lecture method is in line with most of the question items on MANEB paper than group work as most of the questions demand simply recall of information (Pwathenrwa, February, 9, 2016).

Pwathenrwa's utterances reflect that group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences is not very much supported by teachers because MANEB test items are recall type and are best taught through lecture method.

It was also noted during lesson observation that group work method was not used frequently. The participants mostly used chalk and talk style of teaching. For instance, Chingwapi's lesson plan of 18/02/16 indicated the taking on board of group work method. However, the teacher did not use group work method in the actual lesson.

4.9.2 Time consuming as a limitation of group work method in SES

It was also found that the unwillingness to use group work method was compounded with the belief that participatory approaches are time consuming. All the participants expressed the concern that group work method is time consuming. They all said that Social and Environmental Sciences syllabus is so wide and cannot be covered completely using group work method and have time for revision of standards 5-7 work. For instance, one of the teachers remarked:

Group work method is a good method because teachers also learn from learners. However as for standard 8, it should be used on few topics so that the teacher can cover standard 8 work on time and have revision of work from standards 5-7 (Mome, February 19, 2016).

On the same issue of time consuming, another teacher had this to say:

(Group work method imatenga nthawi yochuluka ndipo zimenezi zimandipangitsa kuti mwa period 5 aliyonse ndimaigwiritsa kamodzi kokha)

Group work method is time consuming, such that out of every 5 periods I use it once (Chingwapi, February 16, 2016).

This is also exacerbated by what the teachers feel that the Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum is very wide. For instance, one of the teachers expressed:

(Challenge yaikulu ndi yoti content ya social ndi yochuluka kwambiri. Ndiye wosamala kungoti ungosatira kakaka ndi zomwe zili mu TG ndiye kuti sumaliza zomwe zili muli syllabus. MIE iyunikiretso syllabus kuti kuchuluka kwa ntchito kufanane ndi group work method).

The biggest challenge is that Social and Environmental Sciences syllabus is so wide. So following the demands of the teacher's guide to the latter, one cannot manage to cover the syllabus. So, Malawi Institute of Education should revisit the curriculum to match content with group work method (Phatamphi, February 24, 2016).

The expressions from the three participants illustrate that Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum is very wide. Therefore, group work is deemed as time consuming for one to use it on Social and Environmental Sciences curriculum which is already wide.

It was also noted during classroom observation that the lessons spilled to the subsequent periods when ever group work method was taken on board. For instance, Pwathenrwa's lesson of 04/02/16 took 20 minutes on reporting and consolidation only which resulted in the lesson spilling to the subsequent period meant for another subject. Similarly, Phathamphi's lesson of 12/02/16, the whole group activity took 39 minutes while the whole lesson lasted for 47 minutes instead of 35 minutes.

However, it was also observed in all lessons that the teachers were not stating the time limit for the group activities. This made the learners work in the groups at their own pace without being guided by time. This made the group discussions take more time. Although group work is time consuming, part of this challenge stemmed from the teacher's failure to control time on the various steps involved in group work method. For instance, this is what transpired in one of the participants' lesson:

The teacher asked learners to discuss how self-government was important to the people of Africa but the teacher did not give them the time limit.

After 3 minutes of group discussion the teacher tells learners to discuss 4 points in their groups.

After 7 minutes the teacher tells the learners that the discussion was for five minutes and stated that the remaining time was 3 minutes.

The teacher monitored group work activity just for 2 minutes and the bigger part of the time he just sat down while the learners were discussing (Pwathenrwa, February, 9, 2016).

This excerpt shows that the teacher was not controlling the time well. This was due to lack of knowledge and skill in organising group work successfully.

The study findings have revealed that Social and Environment Sciences test items by MANEB are recall type and that makes teachers to use rote learning methods other than group work when teaching. According to Bourdieu (1990), it means MANEB as part of the field is contributing to the teachers' reluctance to use group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. For the teachers' habitus to be part of a collaborative field requires support from others within the structure of the field of which MANEB is a part (Swartz, 2008). This entails that teachers clung to the habitus of chalk and talk styles of teaching and learning because part of the field which is MANEB was supporting recall type test items which are catalysts to the use of teacher centred methods. Davey (2009) contends that where habitus and field create an almost seamless fit, the possibilities and potentials for change are unlikely.

Similarly, Bourdieu (2004) posits that where individuals enter a new field or the field structure changes, individuals' responses, ideas and behaviours can be seen as adding layer upon layer to habitus. This entails that for the teachers' habitus to shift from didactic practices to group work practice of teaching, the field of MANEB should develop test items of SES that are constructive other than behaviourist in nature. Thomson (2008) contends that social agents (teachers) can experience change in fields when there is a disjunction between their habitus and the current conditions within the

field. Teachers limited their practices of using group work method because of the match in the field between teacher centred methods and recall type test items by MANEB.

Thus, high stakes testing by the Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB) influence teachers to handle their lessons using teacher centred methods other than group work method. The challenge is that standard eight examinations emphasize the knowledge domain at the expense of the skills and attitudes domains (Mhango, 2008). The teachers' focus is on making learners to pass standard eight final examinations so that they should be able to secure form one places which are not enough for all the learners. Chakwera et al. (2004) contend that the general public's interest for secondary school education has increased over the years because the grade eight certificate is no longer useful for the job market. Standard eight written examinations are the only gate-keeping tool for entrance into secondary school education (Chakwera et al., 2004). This puts teachers in a predicament as whether to use rote learning methods or group work. Overemphasis on examinations makes teachers to drift away from the goal of preparing active and competent citizens (Brophy & Alleman, 1991), which is best done using group work method.

The study findings also revealed that teachers are unwilling to use group work method because Social and Environmental Sciences syllabus is deemed as wide and the belief that group work is time consuming. According to Bourdieu (2004) it can as well be said that the teachers' practice of using group work method was impeded by the habitus of the agent (teacher). The habitus, in this case refers to the teachers' beliefs and negative

attitude formed through the embodiment of their life history that group work method is time consuming. Paradoxically, it was also noted that teachers did not control the time well which is characteristic of the teachers' lack of adequate cultural tools to use groupwork method in Social and environmental Sciences well and that contributed to the existing problem of time consuming (DiGiorgio, 2010). It is the lack of cultural tools to regulate time when using groupwork that prevented the teachers' habitus to be transformative or change from teacher centred to groupwork method. The habitus of clinging to rote learning method is open to possibilities and potentials of shifting to groupwork when teachers are equipped with relevant cultural tools befitting the field of participatory teaching and learning (Bourdieu 2004).

These findings authenticate the study by Mizrachi et al. (2010) who observed that time issue is a challenge to take on board participatory approaches such as group work method because Standard 8 in Malawi only lasts two terms instead of the three terms for other standards. In addition, Sikoyo (2010) reports in a study conducted in Uganda that time constraint continue to impinge on the use of participatory approaches as teachers are compelled to complete the curriculum for students to pass examinations. Similarly, Bekoe, Quashigah, Kankam, Eshun, and Bordoh (2014) observe that teachers resist to use participatory approaches such as group work because of the overwhelming amount of material contained in a typical state Social studies curriculum framework.

4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented and discussed teachers' experiences of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. The first theme presented and discussed group composition based on size, gender, ability and fixed nature of the groups. The participants preferred small group size because it heightened learners' participation. However, those groups that were found to be large in size stifled learners' participation. Similarly, the participants preferred gender-mixed groups as it promotes learners' interaction and participation. Nevertheless, some groups did not maintain mixed-gender to the latter and the interaction of the learners' was indeed reduced. In the same vein, the participants preferred mixed ability groups. The mixed groups simplified teacher's work as the fast learners were able to scaffold the slow learners. The learners were also seated in fixed groups. This negatively affected them because they swayed their heads uncomfortably in order to look at the chalkboard.

The second theme presented and discussed the organization of group work activities in SES. The participants, firstly, prepared scheme work and lesson plan. In the classroom the learners are given a group task to discuss. Then the teacher monitored the work. There after the groups presented their work. The teacher then evaluated and consolidated the work. However, some of the steps were not done well like learners reporting similar things thereby leading to boredom. Group work was not properly evaluated as teachers sometimes accepted wrong responses presented. In relation to this, the teachers said that they need in service training on the organization of group work.

The third theme centred on the effects of different categories of group tasks. Some of the group tasks were based on learners' experiences. Such group tasks allowed all learners to make contributions and hence ensued to heightened participation. Other group tasks simply demanded to reproduce content that was already in the text books and this prompted the learners to copy the responses without any group discussion. Other group tasks lacked a base for discussion and that stifled learners' participation.

The fourth theme looked at how group work influenced the development of democratic and citizenship skills. Group work method helps learners to demonstrate leadership, cooperation and participation skills which are some of the pillars to democracy and citizenship which are also taught in Social and Environmental Sciences.

The fifth theme discussed the effect of English as a medium of instruction. Use of English reduced learners' participation during group work. The other theme explored the impacts of teaching and learning resources on group work method. Shortage of resources reduced learners' participation during group work.

The last theme considered the influence of high stakes examination on group work in Social and Environmental Sciences. MANEB examination compel teachers to cover their lesson using rote learning methods other than group work. In addition the SES curriculum is wide and use of group work is deemed as time consuming. The next chapter presents conclusion, implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Chapter overview

This study aimed at exploring primary school teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. This chapter presents the conclusions and implications of the study. Firstly, it reports on the major conclusions drawn from the findings based on the research questions. Secondly, it presents recommendations based on the findings.

5.1 Study conclusions

The main research question guiding the study was: What are Primary school teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences? This was explored through the following specific research questions namely: (a) How do primary school teachers conduct group work method in teaching Social and Environmental Sciences? (b) What are the opportunities of using group work method when teaching Social and Environmental Sciences? and (c) What challenges do primary school teachers experience when using group work method in teaching Social and Environmental Sciences?

Regarding teachers' practices of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences, it can be concluded that teachers do use group work method in SES but the practices are not done effectively due to deficient knowledge and skills of offsetting the challenges affecting the use of the method. Basing on Bourdieu's social field theory, it can be argued that the teachers' practices on the use of group work method in SES were derailed due to deficient cultural tools. Deficient cultural tools made teachers not to transform fully their habitus of teacher centred teaching practices to group work method. The conclusions based on the specific research questions helped to answer the main research question. For instance, on the question of how teachers conduct group work in Social and Environmental Sciences, a number of conclusions were made. Firstly, it can be concluded that groups are formed by considering the size, gender, ability and fixed nature of the groups. However, the size of the groups were not consistent as some were small and others were very large. This affected the participation of the learners. Large group size which was mostly common in urban schools made some learners not to participate fully. Increasing group size promoted 'ringelmann effect' which has an implication on the performance of individual group members. Ringelmann effect's implication on the performance of individual group members was that their performance decreased with increasing group size.

In addition, the teachers were not consistent in the way they formed gender mixed groups. Some groups were composed of one sex only. Other groups in the same classrooms had a mixture of boys and girls, but highly gender-skewed. This affected the interaction that is expected of boys and girls when they are seated in one group. Groups

that were composed of different sexes acted as an impetus to maximum participation of the learners. Mixed gender ensured that the responses to the group tasks were diverse in nature as opposed to those from single gender groups.

Moreover, mixed ability groups were preferred. Fast learners were able to scaffold the slow learners. Sometimes, the fast learners dominated in giving the correct points while the slow learners were not very active.

The results also show that the learners were seated in fixed groups. During the time of reporting and consolidation, some of the learners that were not facing the direction of the chalk board were feeling uncomfortable when they were trying to look onto the front. Although the learners were seated in fixed groups, group work method was not used in all the lessons. It has been established that group work method is used sparingly and so seating of the learners in groups is deemed irrelevant. By using the lens of Bourdieu's thinking tools, it implies that such rules and norms of the field are impeding on the learning process. However, this can also imply that the teachers' deeply rooted habitus of chalk and talk styles of teaching are in conflict with the paradigm shift to group work.

Furthermore, on the issue of how group work is organized, the study has concluded that teachers follow these steps: asking learners to do group discussion, reporting, evaluation and consolidation of the group task. This implies that the teachers have similar habitus of organising group work. However, the way the groups reported their work was boring as each and every group presented almost similar findings. Teachers did not evaluate group

work activities effectively. Most of the teachers did not have time to evaluate or scrutinise the points reported by the groups. This ended up taking some irrelevant points as correct. By using the lens of Bourdieu's thinking tools; this implies that teachers' habitus are limited by lack of appropriate cultural tools to organize group work efficiently.

It can also be concluded that some of the group tasks were appropriate and others were not. The appropriate group tasks were the ones that were based on learner's experiences and had many points that can be discussed. Such tasks enabled all the learners in the group to participate in the construction of knowledge. Some of the inappropriate group tasks were disjunctive in nature and they promoted freeriding. This was so because the nature of the tasks required only one or two successful members in the group to do them. In the same vein, some of the group tasks lacked a base which learners can use to construct knowledge. Most of the teachers simply instructed learners to discuss a concept or topic in groups without using a case study, illustration or any catalyst to connect the learners to their real life experience. This was more problematic in history topics that seemed to be remote to the learners' experiences. This drove the learners to copy the responses for the group tasks from the text book. This implies that teachers lack appropriate cultural tools to come up with appropriate group tasks in Social and Environmental Sciences affect learners participation during the learning process.

On the question of opportunities experienced when using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences, it can be concluded that group work helps to promote

democratic and citizenship skills which is also the goal of Social and Environmental Sciences. This means that those fields (lessons) where the teachers created a sound relationship between the various capitals (resources, skills and knowledge) and habitus (teachers' prior experiences about group work method) ensued to a transformative learning environment that helped to develop democratic and citizenship skills such as promotion of critical thinking, tolerance, mutual respect, problem solving, team spirit and leadership. All these are the pillars of good citizenry which are promoted through the teaching of Social and Environmental Sciences.

On the question of challenges faced when implementing group work in Social and Environmental Sciences, it can be concluded that teachers face a number of them and as such they reduce learners' participation during group work. Firstly, the state's policies on the use of English as a medium of classroom instruction reduced learners' participation during group work. Learners were struggling to discuss and report issues in English fluently. This was exacerbated by the fact that some of the terms in Social and Environmental Science are jargons. This made learners to simply state the points without further explanation or exemplification. Other learners were just reduced to mere spectators during group work activities because of their failure to comprehend issues in English. Using the lens of Bourdieu's thinking tools, it implies that the laws of the field are impacting negatively on the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

Secondly, teaching, learning and assessment resources were not adequate in the course of group work activities. Text books and other relevant books were not adequate. In most of the classes, one learners' text book was shared by all the learners in a group such that others were not able to read the required passage. Classroom space for learners to move around freely during the time of group activities was limited and that affected the use of group work method. All this affected the participation of learners. Shortage of teaching and learning resources affected the construction of knowledge during group work activities. By using Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, field and capital, it implies that the teachers' habitus in the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences is not supported by economic capital (DiGiorgio, 2010). Agbenyega and Klibthong (2012) contends that when capital is devalued, learners' capacity to strategically participate in education is limited.

Another challenge was that Social and Environmental Sciences test items are recall type during the MANEB examinations. Such test items influence teachers to use rote learning methods. The Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB) standard eight examinations require responses which are mostly taught through lecture method other than the constructivist approaches. So lecture method as opposed to group work method is in line with most of the question items on MANEB paper as they demand simply recall of information. Using Bourdieu's thinking tools, it implies that the teachers' habitus to use group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences lacks support from others within the structure of the field (education system) of which MANEB is a part. So group work method is used sparingly because of recall type test items by MANEB.

Lastly, it can be concluded that group work is time consuming. The Social and Environmental Sciences syllabus was described as being very wide. As such teachers felt that using group work method would derail the teaching and learning process and they would not be able to teach the whole syllabus by the end of the year.

It can be argued that this study has solved the identified problem of the study that little is known regarding teachers' practices of the use of group work method in SES. This study has uncovered teachers' practices; like formation of heterogeneous groups, development of group tasks and organisation of group work. Challenges affecting teachers' practices when using group work method in SES were high stakes examination, use of English as medium of instruction and shortage of instruction resources.

5.2 Recommendations

This study has found that there are some challenges that affect the use of group work method in teaching SES. The recommendations are made to the Ministry of education, Science and Technology, Teacher Training Colleges, Primary Education Advisors, teachers and Parent Teachers Association.:

5.2.1 Recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

The Ministry of Education through the District Education Office should ensure that in service training for teachers are conducted pertaining to the use of participatory approaches such as group work method. Some of the teachers were trained before group work method was emphasised in Social and Environmental Sciences. Likewise, the

teachers who were trained recently still need to be updated with new innovations pertaining to the effective use of group work method.

The Ministry of Education should make sure that the school environment is made conducive for the use of group work method through the provision of teaching, learning and assessment resources. Schools are lacking teaching, learning and assessment resources such as text books and chart papers which are a catalyst to the use of group work method.

5.2.2 Recommendations to Teacher Training Colleges

Teacher Training Colleges should intensify the practical aspect of teaching group work. Student teachers should be supervised by their lecturers at the Demonstration Primary Schools to make sure that they are well guided on the use of group work method. Lecturers should also use these methods when teaching so to act as a model to students. This will help the students to follow suit when they go to the primary schools to teach.

In the same vein, Teacher Training Colleges should also equip student teachers with the skills of improvisation of resources and aspect of ‘Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources’ (TALULAR). TALULAR can help to solve the challenge of teaching, learning and assessment resources when using group work method.

5.2.3 Recommendations to Primary Education Advisors

Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) should intensify supervision of lessons especially in standard eight so that proper guidance is given on the use of group work method. Most of the participants said that most PEAs do not supervise lessons in standard eight on the argument that it is a gatekeeping class to Form one. However, the supervision of lessons can help to perfect the work of teachers, hence enable learners to perform much better during examinations.

5.2.4 Recommendations to teachers

Teachers at a school level should organize school based seminars or in service training which can act as a platform for sharing knowledge, skills and experiences of using group work method. Teachers who graduated from college many years ago can take advantage of the new recruits who are equipped with some knowledge and skills of using group work method in SES. Such seminars can also be a good platform for sharing knowledge and skills of making teaching, learning and assessment resources using locally available resources.

In addition, teachers should intensify English speaking in primary schools. Teachers should work cooperatively to make sure that learners from all classes practise English speaking. In the past when teachers were strict with the issue of English speaking, this problem was at least normalised. Language is best learned through practice. In that way both teachers and learners can perfect their fluency and hence improve learners' participation during group work.

5.2.5 Recommendations to Parent Teachers Association

The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) should be encouraged to assist in raising funds to support some classrooms activities to purchase teaching and learning resources. They can also mobilise parents and guardians to erect some tents or build some school blocks. This can help to reduce the problem of space in the classrooms.

5.3 Suggested areas for further study

This study has uncovered numerous contradictions, paradoxes and challenges that require more research. In this regard, this study proposes some areas that need further study and are as follows:

Firstly, there is need to investigate how teachers are prepared in Teacher Training Colleges for the use of group work method in SES. This is so because the study has found that teachers displayed many weak areas pertaining to the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. For instance, some of the challenges were found on the formation of groups, organization of group work, formation of better group tasks, time management and even use of teaching, learning and assessment resources.

Secondly, there is need for an investigation of how learners' English can be improved for it to be used successfully as a medium of instruction in SES. The study found that the use of English was a challenge when using group work in Social and Environmental Sciences. If learners continue facing challenges when English as a medium of instruction is being used, then it means teaching and learning in the real sense may not take place.

Thirdly, there is need for a comparative study on the effects of mixed ability and same ability groups in Social and Environmental Sciences. Most of the teachers opted for mixed ability groups because of the benefits associated with it. However, the study revealed the merits and demerits of using it.

Lastly, an investigation of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences from the side of learners' experiences can be very important. A study focusing on learners is very vital because they are the beneficiaries of the whole process of teaching and learning. The learners' experiences can be an eye opener on the factors that affect their learning when group work method is used in Social and Environmental Sciences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of introduction for data generation from the Dean of Education



Appendix B: Request for the study to the DEM

Machinga Teachers' College,

P.O Box 140,

Liwonde.

04/01/16.

The District Education Manager,

P.O. Box 24,

Machinga

Dear Sir/ Madam,

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

I would like to conduct a research study in four schools in Machinga district.

I am a master of education student at Chancellor College. I have just completed my one-year course work. My research study focuses at teachers' experiences of the use of group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

The participants of the study will involve standard eight Social and Environmental Sciences teachers. Data generation will involve interviews, observation of lessons and analysis of schemes of work and lesson plans. The period of data generation in the schools will last from 04/01/16 to 27/02/16.

All the information from this study will be strictly confidential. I will use pseudonyms to represent the names of the teachers and their schools as regards to data generation, data analysis, and final write-up of the research report.

I will be very grateful if you will grant me the permission to generation data.

Yours' faithfully,

Dyson L. Nyapwala

Appendix C: Consent Letter from the DEM

REF.NO. 1/1/1

Machinga District Education Office
P.O Box 24
Machinga
4th January, 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: DYSON LAISAN NYAPWALA

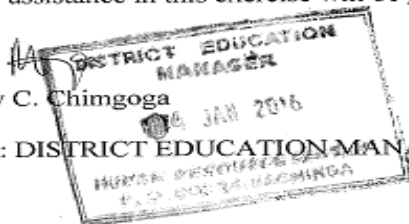
The above named person is a member of staff at Machinga Teachers Training College and currently pursuing a Master of Education (Primary) in Social studies at Chancellor College. He has been given the consent to carry out a research study in Machinga District.

The purpose of his study is to find out Primary school teachers' experiences of using group work method in Social and environmental sciences in standard 8. It is our hope that the results of the study will help to improve the quality of education in Malawi.

Your assistance in this exercise will be greatly appreciated.

Mary C. Chingoga

FOR: DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER



Appendix D: Informed consent form for teachers

CONSENT FORM

Iam Dyson Laisan Nyapwala, a student at Chancellor College, undergoing a Masters of Education (Primary Social studies) course. Iam doing a research study in partial fulfilment of the course. The goal of the study is to explore Primary school teachers' experiences of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences. I would like to conduct two semi structured interviews, three lesson observations and document analysis in Social and Environmental Sciences in standard 8. I will also be taking some notes. The semi structured interviews and lesson observation will be audio-recorded. These audio recordings will be erased at the end of this study. There will be confidentiality of the information as pseudonyms will be used instead of actual names of the participants. So I invite you to participate in this study on voluntary basis. You are free not to participate. Those who choose to participate are also free to withdraw their participation any time they deem it so.

I choose to take part in this study:

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Researcher's name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Appendix E: Time line for activities

Development of full research proposal	DAY	ACTIVITY
	1	Writing the background of the study
	2	Writing the statement of the problem
	3	Writing the purpose of the study and research questions
	4	Writing the theoretical framework
	5	Writing the significance of the study
	6-8	Writing brief literature review
	9-10	Writing the research design
	11-12	Writing methodology of the study (phenomenology)
	13- 14	Writing the sample and sampling method
	15	Writing the methods of data generation
	16-17	Developing ways of data analysis
	18	Developing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study
	19	Writing the ethical considerations
	20	Writing the limitations of the study
Development of instruments for data generation	Day 1: Development of classroom observation schedule	
	Day 2: Development of Interview guide	

			Day 3:Development of Document analysis checklist			
Detailed Time line for data generation activities						
School	Participant	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
One	1	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
	2	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
Two	3	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
	4	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
Three	5	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
	6	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
Four	7	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview
Five	8	First interview	Document analysis	Observation	Observation	Observation & interview

Data analysis	Presentation of findings
	Discussion of the findings
	Conclusion
	Recommendations

Appendix F: Semi structured interview guide

Primary school teachers' experiences of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

1. What do you understand by group work method?
2. What opportunities/advantages are created by the use of group work method in the teaching and learning of Social and environmental sciences?
3. What factors determines the use of group work method in SES?
4. How do you plan and organize group work activities in Social and environmental sciences? (capture step by step from planning to evaluation)
5. How do you form the student groups?
6. How do you determine length of group work? Who determines the groups?
7. How do you facilitate the construction of knowledge during the course of group work activity?
8. How do you ensure learners discipline in the course of group work in Social and environmental sciences?
9. How do you evaluate group work activities in SES?
10. What kind of support do you receive to enable you use group work method proficiently?
11. What kind of support may you wish to receive to enable you use group work method proficiently?
12. In what ways does the use of group work method affect the preparation of PSLCE examinations?

13. What challenges do you encounter when using group work method in the teaching and learning of Social and environmental sciences?
14. How do you overcome such challenges?
15. Is there any issue of concern as regards to the use of group work method in Social and environmental sciences? Especially PSLCE?

Appendix G: Lesson observation schedule

Primary school teachers' experiences of using group work method in Social and Environmental Sciences.

1. What is the composition of the groups in terms of sex, age and ability?
2. How do learners perform the tasks during group work? Are some learners dominating during group work? Who dominates (girls, boys etc.)?
3. What is the average group size?
4. Do all learners finish doing the activities in time?
5. Does the teacher monitor learners performing group tasks? How do learners show that they need teachers' help? Does the teacher get to all learners needing help?
6. What does the monitoring look like?
7. Does the teacher maintain discipline during group work? What does he/she do to maintain the discipline?
8. Are learners given the chance to report their group work? How do they report their work?
9. How does the teacher evaluate group work tasks?
10. What opportunities arise from the use of group work method in Social and environmental sciences?
11. What challenges does the teacher experience when using group work method in Social and environmental sciences?
12. How does the teacher try to overcome such challenges?

Appendix H: Lesson observation schedule

Observation schedule

Topic:

Date:

Class size:

Gender: Boys __ Girls____

Time:

Stage	Teacher's activities	Learners' activities
Introduction		
Development • Group work details		
Conclusion		

Appendix 1 Appendix I: Document analysis checklist

Primary school teachers' experiences of using group work method in Social and environmental sciences.

Type document: Schemes and Records of work, and Lesson plan

Serial No	Checklist item	Yes /No	Comment
1.	Is the lesson plan and schemes of work depicting use of group work method?		
2.	Is the use of group work method recurrent in the schemes of work as it is in the Teachers' guide and syllabus?		
3.	Are the group work tasks likely to be engaging to learners?		
4.	Are the group work tasks relevant to the learners' daily experiences?		
5.	Are the group work activities going to help learners to construct relevant knowledge?		
6.	Are the group work tasks carrying elements that will stir interest to learners?		

7.	Is the time allocated to group work relevant to the complexity of the task?		
8.	Is supervision and monitoring of group work activities depicted in the lesson plan?		
9.	Does group work go together with the use of teaching and learning resources?		
10.	Does the lesson plan show reporting of group work activities?		
11.	Does the lesson plan show how the teacher will consolidate group work activities?		
12.	Is the lesson plan showing evaluation of group work activities?		